

1984

# Love and Rebellion: Louisiana Women Novelists, 1865-1919 (Wetmore).

Susan Millar Williams

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_disstheses](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses)

---

## Recommended Citation

Williams, Susan Millar, "Love and Rebellion: Louisiana Women Novelists, 1865-1919 (Wetmore)." (1984). *LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses*. 4000.  
[https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_disstheses/4000](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/4000)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [gradetd@lsu.edu](mailto:gradetd@lsu.edu).

## INFORMATION TO USERS

This reproduction was made from a copy of a document sent to us for microfilming. While the most advanced technology has been used to photograph and reproduce this document, the quality of the reproduction is heavily dependent upon the quality of the material submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help clarify markings or notations which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or "target" for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is "Missing Page(s)". If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting through an image and duplicating adjacent pages to assure complete continuity.
2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a round black mark, it is an indication of either blurred copy because of movement during exposure, duplicate copy, or copyrighted materials that should not have been filmed. For blurred pages, a good image of the page can be found in the adjacent frame. If copyrighted materials were deleted, a target note will appear listing the pages in the adjacent frame.
3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., is part of the material being photographed, a definite method of "sectioning" the material has been followed. It is customary to begin filming at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. If necessary, sectioning is continued again—beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.
4. For illustrations that cannot be satisfactorily reproduced by xerographic means, photographic prints can be purchased at additional cost and inserted into your xerographic copy. These prints are available upon request from the Dissertations Customer Services Department.
5. Some pages in any document may have indistinct print. In all cases the best available copy has been filmed.

**University  
Microfilms  
International**  
300 N. Zeeb Road  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106



8511771

**Williams, Susan Millar**

**LOVE AND REBELLION: LOUISIANA WOMEN NOVELISTS, 1865-1919**

*The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col.*

**Ph.D. 1984**

**University  
Microfilms  
International** 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106

**Copyright 1985**

**by**

**Williams, Susan Millar**

**All Rights Reserved**





**LOVE AND REBELLION:  
LOUISIANA WOMEN NOVELISTS, 1865-1919**

**A Dissertation**

**Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**in**

**The Department of English**

**by**

**Susan Millar Williams  
B.A., Hendrix College, 1977  
M.A., University of Arkansas, 1979  
August, 1984**

© 1985

SUSAN MILLAR WILLIAMS

All Rights Reserved

## Acknowledgements

Many people have assisted me in completing this dissertation. I want particularly to thank the three people who guided the manuscript to its final form. My major professor, Panthea Reid Broughton, provided expert help and counsel even while overseas. Anna Nardo faithfully covered every draft with exquisite tiny handwriting and advice, and Lewis P. Simpson was always an inspiration and an acute reader. All three were sources of encouragement and good humor, and have served me as examples of what scholars should be.

I am also indebted to my employer, Jim Borck, editor of The Eighteenth Century: A Current Bibliography, who allowed me to borrow his office equipment, endured my moods, and generally kept my spirits up. Evangeline Lynch and the staff of the Louisiana Room at the Louisiana State University Library generously trusted me with rare and sometimes disintegrating materials. Diane Miller and the staff of the Arts and Sciences Text Processing Center patiently and cheerfully led me through the complicated terrain of the word-processor. And Helen Taylor introduced me to Louisiana women writers and suggested ways to approach their work; making her acquaintance was one of the unexpected bonuses of graduate study.

I am also grateful to several friends who have made the project easier. Todd Wilson's critical reading of the manuscript in its early

form caused me to rethink a number of my ideas, and Jan Calloway's enthusiasm for women's studies was infectious. Martha Regalis, Louie Mann, and Joe Boniol were always available when I needed a sympathetic listener.

The love and support of my parents, Dr. and Mrs. Paul H. Millar, jr., and of my parents-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Francis Williams, made graduate study possible.

My husband Dwight has always been the very antithesis of the bad husbands described in this study; without his encouragement, this feminist work would never have been written.

## **Dedication**

**For my mother, Margaret Ann Millar.**

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements. . . . .	.11
Dedication. . . . .	.iv
Table of Contents. . . . .	v
Abstract. . . . .	.vi
Chapter One	
Learning to Lose. . . . .	1
Chapter Two	
Learning to Live. . . . .	.28
Chapter Three	
The Dual Life. . . . .	52
Chapter Four	
Victims and Victors. . . . .	85
Chapter Five	
Unwilling Sisterhood. . . . .	.101
Chapter Six	
Double Jeopardy: Tainted Blood. . . . .	.124
Chapter Seven	
A Feminine World Realized: Elizabeth Bisland Wetmore. . . . .	.149
Bibliography. . . . .	.183
Vita. . . . .	.195

## Abstract

This dissertation is a study of minor Louisiana women novelists from the end of the Civil War to the passage of women's suffrage. A large number of Louisiana women were spurred to write novels by the war and Reconstruction, motivated by both financial considerations and the need to explain their lives. They use conventional forms, like the plantation romance, but the stories they tell suggest that women were ambivalent about Southern traditions and the old order. In breaking down the social codes which both protected and repressed Louisiana women, the Civil War and the Reconstruction led Louisiana women novelists to reconsider the values they had inherited, and even, implicitly at least, to challenge traditional female roles. Although they often seem to have loved the men who perpetuated it, they rebelled against a repressive social structure. In projecting their internal resentments and anxieties in fiction, they were not essentially different from many nineteenth-century women writers. But unlike, say, women writers in New York, or in Yorkshire, Louisiana women writers lived in a defeated patriarchal society founded on the subjection of blacks and on the cult of ideal white womanhood. This society confronted them with parallels to and metaphors for their condition. While their explorations of the issues of freedom and autonomy are frequently tentative and veiled, close examination of plot and characterization reveals that women writers in Louisiana identified the condition of women generally with the suppression and dehumanization of blacks and mulattoes, especially mulatto women. Elizabeth Bisland



Wetmore, however, the best novelist in the group of writers considered in this study. transcended the inhibited approach to the feminine situation in the South. Her work moves the Southern woman's uneasy rebellion against traditional conformity into the dimension of overt irony and wit.

## Chapter One

### Learning to Lose

For Southern women, the years following the Civil War were a time of contradictions. The war and Reconstruction had destroyed appreciable areas of the land both economically and physically, the male population was depleted, and many women had to find employment or to assume the burdens of running family farms and businesses. For Southern women the world was insecure and uncomfortable. But in exchange for security and comfort, they were offered opportunities promising self-reliance and freedom. Women began to enter traditionally male spheres, including literature. They began to write about themselves and their lives.

In 1957, Robert A. Lively published a definitive study of Civil War novels called Fiction Fights the Civil War. Having read over five hundred novels, he felt that he had looked at almost all of the books on that subject that had ever been published. But in a table which classifies authors by their home states for the period from 1862 to 1948, he counts only three from Louisiana.<sup>1</sup> Like many critics, Lively was unaware of the scores of Civil War novels written by women. Although he does treat a few of the most popular female novelists, the subjects of his study are predominantly male. But if Louisiana provides

<sup>1</sup> Fiction Fights the Civil War: An Unfinished Chapter in the Literary History of the American People (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1975), p. 28.

a fair sample, there were an equal or even greater number of women who used the war and its aftermath as a focus for fiction; in fact, as Lively suggests, the conventions of the genre were first set by women.<sup>2</sup> These novels have been largely ignored, or, at best, dismissed as trivial by critics. As Ann Douglas Wood points out, it was the local colorists who were recognized as the literary lionesses of the period from the end of the war to the turn of the century, and the short story was the reigning genre.<sup>3</sup>

Like lush grass after a hard winter, Louisiana produced an amazing growth of novels by women after the war. The majority were published during what Francis Pendleton Gaines identifies as the flood-tide of plantation novels, the 1880s and 90s, a period during which the public seemed to have an insatiable taste for books about the romantic South.<sup>4</sup> Gaines dismisses the phenomenon as part of a fad or vogue, commercially motivated and superficial, and certainly none of the novels of the time are great works of art. Many were written with the hope of financial gain: in a study of women in public affairs in Louisiana during Reconstruction, Kathryn Schuler identifies writing as second only to education as a field in which women attempted to earn a living.<sup>5</sup> But almost none of the female novelists simply look back with nostalgia to

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> "The Literature of Impoverishment: The Women Local Colorists in America 1865-1914," Women's Studies, 1 (1972), 3-45.

<sup>4</sup> The Southern Plantation: A Study in the Development and Accuracy of a Tradition (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1924. Rpt. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1962), p. 124.

<sup>5</sup> "Women in Public Affairs in Louisiana During Reconstruction," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, 19 (July 1936), 715.

the days before the war. Instead they focus on the drama of the conflict and its aftermath and reveal an earnest and painful attempt to record, examine, and explain the upheaval and its meaning for their own lives. Part of this meaning derived from the fact that the war and Reconstruction spurred them to write. There were rather few Louisiana novelists before the war, and almost no women. But between 1865 and 1919, there were about one hundred novelists, and well over half (about sixty-seven) were women.<sup>6</sup> Gaines, in fact, refers to the "Louisiana tradition" as "a fairly distinct one."<sup>7</sup>

Because their backgrounds show remarkable similarity, it is possible to draw a composite picture of the typical Louisiana literary lady in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> She is white. Her parents come from old and respected families, and her father is either landed or professional. Her parents encourage her and dote upon her, since she is usually the eldest child, the only daughter, or the only child. She is precocious and studious in childhood and is usually educated at home before being sent away to a boarding school where she distinguishes herself. She generally experiences grief and sorrow at an

<sup>6</sup> Based on Albert George Alexander, "Louisiana Writers 1875-1900," Master's thesis Peabody College 1931; Lizzie Carter McVoy and Ruth Bates Campbell, A Bibliography of Fiction by Louisianans and on Louisiana Subjects (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1935); and Donald E. Thompson, comp., A Bibliography of Louisiana Books and Pamphlets in the T. P. Thompson Collection of the University of Alabama Library (University: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1947).

<sup>7</sup> Gaines, p. 84.

<sup>8</sup> Information is drawn from biographies in Alexander and in Edwin Anderson Alderman and Joel Chandler Harris, eds., The Library of Southern Literature (17 vols.) (Atlanta: Martin and Hoyt, 1907) and [Mary T. Tardy], Southland Writers: Biographical and Critical Sketches of the Living Female Writers of the South, by Ida Raymond (pseud.) (2 vols.) (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remson, and Haffelfinger, 1870).

early age, losing one or perhaps both parents. She begins writing verse, then graduates to prose, and finally moves on to the novel. She publishes her first piece (a poem or a short story) at a very early age (fourteen to eighteen) under a romantic pseudonym such as Filia or Creole, in a newspaper. She becomes a frequent contributor to the periodical press, gradually becoming known under her real name even though she is averse to any kind of publicity. (She might in later life go on to become an editor for one of the many women's magazines, such as The Sunny South.) At about this time she acquires a male mentor, who has connections and can offer her literary and business advice. She marries very young, as young as fourteen. Her husband is an older man, usually a lawyer, a judge, or an editor, who has wealth and social position. Surprisingly, marriage seems to release and encourage her talents, not stifle them. However, the advent of children is a different matter. Chances are, she writes less or ceases altogether if she has more than one or two, and it is generally the childless (like M. E. M. Davis) who write many novels. Most writers produce only one or two.

The Louisiana woman writer is overwhelmingly patriotic, having been touched personally by the Civil War which she credits with spurring her literary production. She is likely to have volunteered for work in a military hospital if she was old enough. She may have lost a husband, a lover, a father, a brother, her home, or her fortune in the war. Certainly she has lost the comfortable life she had been used to.

Joel Chandler Harris satirized Southern lady writers, noting their objection to realism and their tendency to choose pseudonyms like "Miss Sweetie Wildwood" and "C. Melnotte Jonquil."<sup>9</sup> But Gerald W. Johnson, an iconoclastic journalist/critic who was a protégé of H. L. Mencken, describes the real post-bellum Southern woman more accurately and more approvingly:

This lady literally had everything--grace, dignity, intelligence shot through with humor, astounding endurance, a spice of malice, and a courage that might have put Bayard<sup>10</sup> to shame. But she was not a product of the antebellum South. She was the woman who was a young girl during, or shortly after, the Civil War; and far from being a hot-house flower, her existence was about as sheltered as that of Molly Pitcher, who served the gun at Monmouth. Southern women were not sheltered from 1865 to 1880. . . . The South, between 1865 and 1880, had no room for hothouse flowers. It was a storm-beaten land, a land of blood and fire. Even the most privileged of its women in those days were intimately acquainted with the three great verities, poverty and love and war; and any one of them who survived at all, survived because she was a harder-boiled virgin than anything that Frances Newman's heroine<sup>11</sup> ever imagined. Perhaps she had never heard of the Freudian libido, but in dealing with the newly-liberated blacks she learned plenty about rape, incest, and sadism.<sup>12</sup>

Johnson's conclusions about the South and its literature reflect an

<sup>9</sup> Paul Cousins, Joel Chandler Harris: A Biography (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1968), p. 120.

<sup>10</sup> Pierre du Terrail, Chevalier de Bayard (1476-1524), "the knight without fear and without remorse" for whom Faulkner's Bayard Sartoris is named (my note).

<sup>11</sup> Frances Newman's The Hard-boiled Virgin (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926) was a twenties shocker, critical of the unrealistic and materialistic training of nice upper-class Southern girls (my note).

<sup>12</sup> Gerald W. Johnson, "The Horrible South," in Southwatching: Selected Essays, ed. Fred Hobson (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1983), p. 32.

accurate sense of both its strengths and its weaknesses. In 1923 he took issue with Mencken's famous contention that the South was "The Sahara of the Bozart," suggesting that it was far more jungle than desert and that its "literary fauna" was "rich and curious," not absent. He continues, "If Mr. Mencken presumes to doubt it, I invite him to plunge into the trackless waste of the Library of Southern Literature, where a man might wander for years encountering daily such a profusion of strange and incredible growths as could proceed from none but an enormously rich soil."<sup>13</sup> Johnson indicates not that the literary products of the South were glorious at this point, but that their intensity and profusion presage a future blossoming of great writing based on the tensions and contradictions of the region. A number of the strange (and admittedly sub-literary) products in the seventeen-volume Library of Southern Literature were written by Louisiana women. While none of them are great artists, and few, regrettably, are even good novelists, their works were popular and widely read, and they form a significant part of the inheritance of writers of the Southern Renaissance, the "immoderate past"<sup>14</sup> which animates Faulkner and Warren and Welty. Even more important, they represent the concerns and attitudes of their creators; they are part of the sizeable canon of works by women which have until recently been considered trivial when they were not entirely ignored. As Kay Mussell points out, in popular fiction "it is the type of fiction, the fact that a number of women

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> C. Hugh Holman, The Immoderate Past: The Southern Writer and History (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1977.) Holman takes his title from Allen Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead."

writers and women readers converged on the same fictional pattern over a long period of time, that is significant."<sup>15</sup> Often surprisingly eccentric in their use of popular formulas, the novels show strong patterns in plot, characterization, imagery, and setting.

Employing love and rebellion (the phrase is borrowed from Martha Caroline Keller<sup>16</sup>) as central themes, these novels are almost all romances in the popular sense. Against the backdrop of the Civil War and Reconstruction, a hero and a heroine fall in love, are thwarted, and finally marry. On a deeper level, however, the novels I will discuss explore a fundamental psychological conflict between love and rebellion, a tension which feminist scholars argue represents the major motive in the life of the nineteenth century woman.

Barbara Welter states that "Submission was perhaps the most feminine virtue expected of women,"<sup>17</sup> a conclusion supported by Ann Douglas, Anne Goodwyn Jones, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar.<sup>18</sup> At the very time of life when the human impulse is toward self-definition, self-discovery, and freedom from the restraints of childhood, young

<sup>15</sup> Kay Mussell, Women's Gothic and Romantic Fiction: A Reference Guide (London: Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 98.

<sup>16</sup> Love and Rebellion: A Story of the Civil War and Reconstruction (New York: J. S. Ogilvie, [c. 1891.])

<sup>17</sup> Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1976), p. 27.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed discussion of the cult of ideal womanhood and its nineteenth-century manifestations, see Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977); Anne Goodwyn Jones, Tomorrow is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936 (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1981); and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979.)



women learn that their society expects and enforces marriage and that marriage involves complete submission to the will of another, economic dependence, and sacrifice of the self to the family. In order to deserve love, the nineteenth-century woman was asked to renounce self; in order to retain a self, she often had to rebel against the social restraints imposed by those she loved. Thus many women lived with a perpetual internal conflict between love and rebellion, a conflict which, given the social and political context, was fundamentally unresolvable.

In the nineteenth century, the role of upper and middle class women was clearly and rigidly defined, though recent feminist studies show that many women were ambivalent towards that ideal. The traditional role of the good woman, the one set on the pedestal to be worshipped, can best be summed up by one word--passivity. Ideal femininity is conservative and self-immolating. The good woman is religious, moral, and cultured, but never avant-garde or innovative. She is educated in such matters as will aid in her role as a domestic arbiter of morals and manners, but she is never an intellectual. She is selfless, living through her husband and children. She is not self-aware in the sense that she can gauge her effect on others or understand her own feelings. She does not resent (i.e. she is not aware of) her precarious economic status, which hinges always on male approval and makes her into an object or "goods." She is allowed (indeed encouraged) to wield "influence" (usually moral), but never to use more overt forms of power. Given such a set of rules, it is small wonder that, as Joanna Russ puts it, "The Love Story is--for women--bildungsroman, success,

failure, education, and the only adventure possible, all in one."<sup>19</sup> And given such a set of rules, it is equally unsurprising that the women who wrote did so with an uneasy sense that vocation was incompatible with virtue. Though Ann Douglas Wood rightly emphasizes that "it was a significantly less dangerous thing in America to be an authoress in 1880 than in 1840,"<sup>20</sup> women who wrote were still suspect, and they knew it.

Tremendous anxiety about the act of writing, both on the part of the writers themselves and of their biographers, is reflected in the obsessive insistence that their domestic roles were unimpaired because of their writing.<sup>21</sup> They are uniformly said to be kind to the poor and mourning, exemplary wives and mothers, crack household managers: domestic paragons. Catharine Cole, a.k.a. Martha R. Field, was a bright and energetic woman who toured the Gulf Islands alone, journeyed through the Blind River country in a canoe, explored Louisiana in a buggy, served as the New Orleans Picayune's Washington correspondent, and travelled in Europe. Yet her career is justified by her biographer in this way:

Mrs. Field's talent is not confined altogether to journalism. She can make as good a salad as she can write an essay. Recently a New York paper offered a prize of \$10 for the best menu for a Thanksgiving dinner, with the recipes for every dish. The celebrated chefs throughout the country were among the competitors. Catharine Cole entered the list, and it may

<sup>19</sup> "Somebody is Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's My Husband: The Modern Gothic," Journal of Popular Culture, 6 (Spring 1973), 686.

<sup>20</sup> Wood, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> Welter points out that suffragists and lady reformers, along with Margaret Fuller and Harriet Beecher Stowe, "insisted that they never 'shirked' a single domestic duty" (p. 167).

be added that she is as proud of winning that cooking prize as she is of the finest complement ever paid her.<sup>22</sup>

There are, as Mrs. M. H. Williams declares in the same publication, "higher and holier duties"<sup>23</sup> than literature, and they are domestic ones. A lady author, to be worthy of respect, should maintain, like M. E. M. Davis, a domestic life "as complete as if her fingers were innocent of ink stains and her desk of publishers' proposal."<sup>24</sup> The sexual overtones of the language are no accident. Eliza Lofton Pugh's biography in Southland Writers perhaps best exemplifies the insistence, accurate or not, on this "unstained" domestic tranquillity:

Giving all her spare moments to her pen, and to a careful supervision of her only child, she has not permitted her literary life to cast the shadow of an ill-regulated household on those who look to her for their happiness, or to cloud for an instant the sunshine of home. She has not sunk the woman in the author, and has unhesitatingly declared her purpose to relinquish the pleasure of the pen should a word of reproach from those she loves warn her of such a probability. Yet to all who know her, that domestic circle proves that a combination of the practical and the literary may be gracefully, pleasantly, and harmoniously blended.

Mrs. Pugh is fitted to adorn a wider circle in society than that she so gracefully fills at Lyns-Hope, her home, in Assumption Parish. Those who know her well, admire her less for her talents than for the kindly heart which prompts her to aid the poor and needy, and for her untiring and tender offices in sick-rooms, where one quickly discovers the element of the "true woman."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Louisiana Authors: Proceedings of a Round Table Held at the Louisiana Chautauqua on July 19, 1893 (Monroe, La.: Evening News Print, 1893), p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> Tardy, p. 296.

To be admired for one's talents rather than for one's kindly heart or one's cooking skills was somewhat shameful. Though by the 1860s the tradition of female writers was well-established and their books were vastly popular, women still felt guilty about writing.<sup>26</sup> Prefaces abound with apologies and disclaimers, often extremely profuse and elaborate, like this one, radically shortened, from Blue and Gray, whose author took the extra precaution of publishing under a pseudonym:

Timidly we launch, at this late date, upon the broad stream of universal criticism, this simple little story . . . intended as a cementing, or peace-offering. . . . Our mind may not be stored with lore or logic, and far from brilliant, yet we disdain useless polly-syllables [sic] aiming but to indite a plain, sensible recital, according "honor to whom honor is due," therefore, earnestly plead for leniency [sic] from the gifted and wise, and as charity and generosity are noble traits, we entreat their combined assistance to aid us in our humble endeavor to please, trusting that something in the following pages may point a moral for the lasting benefit of some careless soul, from a discerning public.<sup>27</sup>

In the dedication to the Battalion Washington Artillery, New Orleans, the same author hopes that "this slight testimony of respect will not be construed into one of presumption," calling it a "small simple work." In fact, Blue and Gray is far from being either small or simple, and depicts conflicts and situations which are profound and dramatic: war, violence, forbidden love, and the conflict between personal feelings and the dictates of duty. The surfeit of modesty apparently seemed tiresome

<sup>26</sup> See Gilbert and Gubar, pp. 45-92.

<sup>27</sup> Louisiana [pseud.], Blue and Gray; or, Two Oaths and Three Warnings (New Orleans: [L. Graham and Son], 1885.) Many novels are decidedly eccentric in their use of spelling, punctuation, and grammar. I have, however, used [sic] only sparingly in the passages quoted hereafter.

even in 1867, when Ingemisco, a novel by "Fadette," was advertised as "Singularly novel in its departure from stereotyped forms of introduction; without preface or plea for leniency of judgement."<sup>28</sup> Yet most women felt constrained to add such apologies, even in the 1880s and after.

The persistence of the romance as favorite genre is a result partly of the limitation of suitable adventures for heroines and partly of this apologetic demeanor. With the sentimental novelists, romance novels had become generally acceptable and traditionally feminine. They were regarded as apolitical, conservative, and if sometimes too fevered for the innocent young person, fundamentally moral in their conclusions. A writer need not apologize so much for a novel with a political background or a mildly unconventional heroine as for an essay on state's rights or women's rights. Fiction often functioned as camouflage.

Therefore, although almost without exception these books are romances in the sense that their conclusions center around the culmination of a love affair which has developed throughout the novel, to pigeonhole them in this way is to get a distorted picture of the concerns of Louisiana women of the period. For most twentieth-century readers, the words "popular romance" conjure up the image of the bland porridge of the Harlequin series, books written to a pattern and carefully expurgated of ideas and individuality. But in reading a wide selection of these earlier novels, most published in cheap formats, many in paperback series, one discovers a strong sense of mission, the determinedly political and philosophical and scientific thrust of the

<sup>28</sup> An advertisement in the back of Eliza Lofton Pugh's Not a Hero: A Novel (New Orleans: Blelock, 1867.)

books. Anne Firor Scott has suggested that Southern women were politicized by the Civil War,<sup>29</sup> and as a group these women support her theory. They are indeed interested in love and marriage, but in many cases love takes a back seat to other concerns. Martha Caroline Keller, for example, spends at least eighty percent of her space in Love and Rebellion and Severed at Gettysburg<sup>30</sup> on political scenes and temperance lectures, and less than twenty percent on following the twists and turns of the love plot. She records battles and political conspiracies in careful detail, and preaches passionately about the evils of wealth.

These women want to deal with issues and ideas as well as with feelings, though they are often poorly equipped to do so. Their novels tend to be unconventionally structured, perhaps because they were instinctively following the course that Thomas Nelson Page recommended to Grace King to make a story saleable:

Just rip the story open and insert a love story. It is the easiest thing to do in the world. Get a pretty girl and name her Jeanne, that name always takes! Make her fall in love with a Federal officer and your story will be printed at once!"<sup>31</sup>

Quite a number of Louisiana women seem to have discovered this trick, and by taking advantage of the enormous public vogue for romances set in the South managed to find an audience for their ideas about politics, education, alcohol, the negro question, women's roles, and a multitude

<sup>29</sup> The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970.)

<sup>30</sup> Severed at Gettysburg (New York: J. S. Oglivie, 1887.)

<sup>31</sup> Grace King, Memories of a Southern Woman of Letters (New York: Macmillan, 1932), p. 378.

of other issues. In at least one case, the importance of the historical content of these books has been recognized; Mary Edwards Bryan's Wild Work, a novel about Reconstruction riots, has been used as a source for historical studies.<sup>32</sup> Writing fiction, if not entirely genteel, was in many ways a protection from criticism. By the middle of the nineteenth century, novels were generally recognized as a feminine genre. But as essayists, these women would probably have found neither publishers nor public approval. A significant number of their heroines attain great fame by writing serious non-fiction, indicating that intellectual success was a frequent fantasy, but the triumph is never described vividly or at length, as though these women could not even fantasize convincingly about such an eventuality because it seemed so unlikely.

Though traditionally women were expected to be silent on the subject of politics, Catherine Clinton points out that a "notable exception" to this silence was "women's active expression of their own patriotism."<sup>33</sup> Though women did not often make public speeches, they were apparently quite outspoken about the nobility of the defeated South. They were particularly active in memorializing the dead, both with monuments and ceremonies. In 1873, Jefferson Davis proudly said that he had never seen a reconstructed Southern woman.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, it does seem that women, although they did not physically take up arms for the Confederacy, were more insistently, uncompromisingly patriotic than

<sup>32</sup> Most notably in H. O. Lestage, Jr., "The White League and Its Participation in Reconstruction Riots," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, 18 (July 1935), 617-95.

<sup>33</sup> The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), p. 181.

<sup>34</sup> Nation, 17 (1873), 126.

the men who fought. Evalina Dulaney, though perhaps mythical, embodies the spirit of the unreconstructable Southern woman. The war bride of a Confederate soldier, at the end of the conflict she "made her children little cloaks from the gray uniform and used his sabre ground down for a kitchen knife, (literally fulfilling Scripture), and his old army blanket lay across the foot of the trundle bed."<sup>35</sup> Evalina's attitude was born of both necessity and pride: she made do with what she had, and she made sure that her children would never forget the cost of the conflict.

Southern women had experienced the hardships and losses of war without any attendant glamor. "Southern womanhood" had served as a rallying point, a central image which was used as a symbol for the Cause. Nevertheless, the relationship of the Southern lady to her region and to the traditions it represented was ambivalent. When a Southern woman seems to be expressing complete, almost fanatic belief in the old order, the identification she expresses, when subjected to close analysis, usually proves to be connected with a sort of abstract South which has experienced the same kind of initiation into submission as she has. Welter points out that it was quite common to equate the plight of women with that of the defeated Confederacy:

The suffering of the South, like all female suffering, receives meaning in the context of religion, and the injustices of this life where male vice is frequently favored over female virtue,

<sup>35</sup> Matthew Page Andrews, The Women of the South in War Times (Baltimore: Norman, Remington, 1920), pp. 110-11. The reference is to Isaiah 2:4: "And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."



just as the South may be crushed by the North, will be righted in the next world.<sup>36</sup>

In other words, if one calls defeat, submission, and denial of identity by another name--martyrdom--then loss and destruction may be transformed into glory.

Women unquestionably identified with the defeated South. During Reconstruction the region was subjected to what it considered alien rule. No city was more affected than New Orleans, under the humiliating reign of "Beast" Butler, and Louisiana's reconstruction, as Kathryn Schuler notes, was effectively begun in 1862, subjecting it to the longest experience of Northern control of any Southern state.<sup>37</sup> The extent of the physical damage caused by the war is succinctly presented by Roger Shugg; he says that no state in the South, except possibly Virginia, South Carolina, or Georgia, suffered more than Louisiana, and that "at least one-fifth and probably more of Louisiana's able-bodied white men died on the field of battle or in hospitals." Louisiana lost more than half its former wealth. The plantations were destroyed, and "Because of the loss of slaves essential to their cultivation, and the destruction of levees, the land was almost worthless. Everywhere it depreciated so much that mortgages were foreclosed at a third of their value . . . real property was worth but 30 per cent of its pre-war value, and one-third of the land was no longer in cultivation."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Welter, p. 108.

<sup>37</sup> Schuler, p. 749.

<sup>38</sup> Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana: A Social History of White Farmers and Laborers During Slavery and After, 1840-1875 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1939 and 1968), pp. 191, 194, 192-3.

Louisiana's government was "reconstructed," its peculiar institutions dismantled; it was forced to recognize economic dependence on the North. In other words, its identity was blurred, its autonomy revoked, making it an appropriate symbol for women of the period.

The Civil War and Reconstruction are obsessive themes for Louisiana women writers, serving not only as the backdrop to most of their novels but as a central focus, a major plot element, and an animating force. But disapproval and resentment of particular aspects of Southern tradition, such as the cult of ideal womanhood and the subjection of blacks, are expressed covertly but unmistakably.

It would be easy to dismiss these books as simply formulaic attempts to capitalize on a commercial fad. I believe, however, that these novels are not assembly-line products and that they can and should be viewed as surprising attempts by a large number of Southern women both to understand and to explain the contradictions of their own lives. The subjects which absorb their interest form a pattern; they are closely related to the tangled problem of identity presented not only by being female, but by being female in a defeated patriarchal society built on slavery, on the idealization of the white leisured woman, and on extreme class consciousness. The defeat makes many of the old values untenable while paradoxically elevating them to mythic significance, and it fails to produce acceptable new ones. In some women this failure produces opportunism; in others, apathy. But for about sixty Louisiana women who left novels in print, it created an intense desire to tell stories about characters who are faced with these ambiguities. In the process they dramatize their conflicting attitudes toward men, marriage, the war, blacks, slavery, wealth, aristocracy,

education, the South, and their own roles and personalities.

Those works that center on a heroine (and almost all do) follow a pattern common to works by nineteenth-century women--they describe a woman's education into submission. The striking difference between these authors and those in, say, New York or Yorkshire is that Southern life presented them with a wealth of metaphors for their condition. In a sense, they were standing in a hall of mirrors, faced on all sides with magnifications, distortions, but always with reflections of their own situation. Wealthy and aristocratic Southerners suddenly found themselves penniless and denied political power. Blacks, though freed, were still a subject race, and were progressively disillusioned after the war to find that their freedom was only nominal and that in order to lead relatively comfortable lives they must still submit to white wills. While black slavery was unquestionably the basis for the defeated society with which Southern women identified so strongly, it was also an uncomfortable reminder of their own lack of freedom. Leslie Fiedler says of Harriet Beecher Stowe, who represented the devil incarnate to her Southern sisters,

Merely by having been born a woman in her time and place . . . Mrs. Stowe had been born in her deepest self-consciousness a slave--forbidden by a law more absolute than the statutes of legislatures any recourse from patriarchal power except submission and prayer.<sup>39</sup>

Southern women identified with a society based on slavery as well as with slaves themselves, and a recognition of the connection could only cause them great psychological conflict about who they really were.

<sup>39</sup> Inadvertant Epic: From Uncle Tom's Cabin to Roots (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), p. 33.

Out of this conflict come novels like Mrs. J. H. Walworth's Without Blemish,<sup>40</sup> which despite its title's insistence on racial purity fundamentally argues for tolerance. Walworth undoubtedly possessed intensity and energy; her books show evidence of angry ambivalence, and she was obviously torn between defending inherited values and codes and expressing a humanistic and feminist sensibility which surfaced inexorably and involuntarily in her attempts to write about individual characters and situations. Walworth vacillates from paragraph to paragraph in her loyalties, and there is a startling contradiction between what she says and what she shows, although the tone of the book is decidedly not ironic. For example, just sentences after Walworth has declared that negroes have no cares and take no thought for the morrow, a black woman is portrayed earnestly planning all the details of a future garden (p. 185). And although Walworth states with apparent conviction that "The cultivation of the affections and the emotions was no part of the cult of their race" (p. 186), implying that blacks are incapable of family feeling, the one fierce act of loyalty in the novel is that of a black mother. Rose is ready to sacrifice everything for her child: "All she asked was to be the humble self-renouncing witness of her child's social exaltation" (p. 103). Walworth, like most Louisiana women who wrote novels during this period, seems to be fighting an internal battle between her inherited values and prejudices and a more liberal, perhaps radical, set of ideas she has acquired through experience.

<sup>40</sup> Without Blemish: Today's Problem (New York: Cassell, 1886). After an initial footnote to each, all future references to individual novels will be given as page numbers within the text.

What the war did to the psyches and the world-views of these women is perhaps best summed up by the author of Towards the Gulf, Mississippi Morris Buckner, speaking of a sad, dowdy, and unmarried woman who is drawing toward middle age. "The influences moulding most women's lives, making chance rather than personal effort the autocrat of their future, were powerful in her case."<sup>41</sup> The fortunes of war, the realities of living in a defeated, economically crippled country where the old certainties no longer applied, served to increase dramatically all the pressures felt by nineteenth-century women.<sup>42</sup> Often the genteel tradition came in direct conflict with survival; the emblem of this realization for most modern readers is, of course, Scarlett O'Hara's dramatic scene with the radish: "I'll never be hungry again." Most types of gainful employment lowered a woman's respectability, as a young woman in another novel, Uncle Scipio, explains:

I want to go . . . where, if a woman has anything to offer, she may offer it; if it is in her to do anything, she can do it. Some of these days it will be so in Virginia, but not yet awhile; we are too close to the days when labor meant servitude, for it to be tolerated in women. I want to work at

<sup>41</sup> Towards the Gulf: A Romance of Louisiana (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1887), p. 67.

<sup>42</sup> Ann Douglas (in The Feminization of American Culture) sees the Southern woman's experience as delayed: "It was not until after the Civil War that she had to deal with the problems arising from a modernizing urbanizing economy which had beset her northern sister several generations before" (p. 57). Her statement is confirmed by Shugg, who comments on the exploitation of women and children in the industrial growth of New Orleans in the latter half of the century (pp. 295-96).

something; I'm not quite clear what. What a pity girls should not all be trained to something.<sup>43</sup>

Women needed to work after the war; many wanted to. Yet the older values were still disturbingly present in the South, making idleness a condition of femininity. In a contest between survival and gentility, survival usually won, but not without a struggle.

Loss of money and loss of status, however devastating, are not the worst of the fortunes of war: death is a constant in these novels. Occasionally it functions as in the sentimental tradition, with protracted death scenes resulting in moral illumination and conversions for other characters. But in the majority of novels, loss and death multiply so rapidly that they lose the luxurious quality of individual significance. Often the deaths come so fast and so unremittingly that the heroine can do little more than reel from the shock, and sentimentality becomes impossible under these conditions. Not all of these fictional deaths are war-related; they result from epidemics, from accidents with machinery, from drowning, and from a wide variety of other causes. But the grim familiarity with loss probably does come from first-hand experience with war. Death for these women is not domesticated as it was for the sentimental novelists.

Martha Caroline Keller's Love and Rebellion, published in 1891 as part of the "Sunny Side Series," is decidedly not sunny in outlook, and can serve as an example of novels in which death proliferates. It is a

<sup>43</sup> Walworth, Uncle Scipio: A Story of Uncertain Days in the South (New York: R. F. Fenno, 1876), p. 297. In outlining women's economic conditions in the nineteenth century, Judith Lowder Newton makes similar observations (Women, Power, and Subversion: Social Strategies in British Fiction, 1778-1860 [Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1981], p. 17).

feminine adventure story, following the heroic exploits of the genteel Miriam and her mother Mrs. Hargrove as they serve as military spies and black market agents.<sup>44</sup> Men fear them, and they outsmart everyone. They brave incredible hardship, successfully disguise themselves as negroes, steal documents, survive stabbings. Attacks come thick and fast, but they dispose of all attackers with an almost ludicrous ease. Fending off an attack by murderous Mexicans, "Mrs. Hargrove coolly and deliberately commanded the negroes to make a breastwork of saltsacks while she and Miriam kept back the assailants with their unerring fire. This was successfully done, and all were speedily sheltered behind the entrenchment" (p. 35). And that is that. One assumes that they simply dust their hands.

Keller does, however, make an effort to show the horrors of war. When two soldiers are found, one dead, one wounded, the women talk of animals drawn by the scent of their blood. And when Miriam and her mother watch the siege of Vicksburg from a cave, Keller offers this vignette without comment: "A dog slunk near; the Confederate killed it, threw it across his shoulder, and soon disappeared" (p. 139). Apparently the man is starving and intends to eat the dog, but the particulars are left to the reader's imagination. Mrs. Hargrove dies in the cave; her son Russell is killed in the battle. Vicksburg surrenders. Miriam, left alone, faces the loss of her loved ones and

<sup>44</sup> There were a number of women who actually did serve as military spies and blockade runners. It is possible that Keller's heroine was a romanticized version of Mrs. William Kirby, a Louisiana woman whose son died at Gettysburg. After the occupation of Baton Rouge she ran the blockade, first with quinine and later with arms and ammunition. She was finally arrested, convicted as a spy, and imprisoned. She died, still a prisoner, near the end of the war (Andrews, pp. 116-19).

her cause: "How long, how nearly endless appeared the dreary future. Yet she must live" (pp. 142-43).

Though the war ends, Miriam's trials have just begun. She goes back to the desolate plantation, where the white population is constantly under attack by negroes. She continues to perform heroically in the world of politics and action; she also teaches and writes articles. The world is full of violence, but family affairs are considerably more painful for Miriam than public ones. She has a wicked brother named George. He drinks. He steals from her. He opens her mail and uses the information he gets to oppose her politically. He becomes a scalawag politician. Finally he hits his grandmother, nearly killing her, after she has subjected herself to the ultimate indignity, sewing for negroes, to earn his tuition, which he spends on drink. Drunk at a political meeting, he invites several negroes to his home, and they decide to go, for though he was dead drunk when he invited them, he is the head of the house. Keller reflects bitterly, "What the negroes said was true. He was the head of the Hargrove establishment. His sisters paid the rent, bought the provisions, and with the help of faithful old Ben's [a former slave's] earnings, paid all the expenses of the family, even settling the debts for liquor, incurred by George himself" (p. 187). The woman and the black man, whatever their economic contributions, are traditionally denied any authority.

The catalogue of horrors, both public and private, goes on and on, and the reader besieged by it is tempted to conclude that Keller simply has no conception of dramatic form and building tension. From the first chapters of the novel things are awful, and it is hard to imagine how they could get progressively more awful. On page 216 Keller declares



that "Louisiana now became a charnel," and the reader's startled reaction is that it seems to have already been one for an interminable length of time. But the structure, the unrelenting barrage of undifferentiated horrors, probably reflects far more accurately than traditional dramatic form, with its careful rise and fall of action, the quality of experience which women endured during the years of war and Reconstruction. For Miriam, the loss of friends and relatives has just begun on page 216. The next episodes make the number of corpses on the stage at the end of Hamlet seem insignificant. First, Miriam's little sister Lilian, who enters a hut to help a poor child, is nearly raped and then is killed. "They found the body of the gentle Lilian lying there, but recently dead; her brains scattered over the dry leaves, her blood staining the ground" (p. 221). The faithful Ben is killed trying to protect her, and the shock of seeing her body kills Miriam's grandmother. Miriam's conventional fiancé Cuthbert Ellery, a wealthy lawyer from an old Southern family, is killed by George and his cohorts, and then George is killed. Significantly, however, all this loss produces gain. When everybody is dead, Miriam is left free to marry Belmont Manning, the Federal officer who has been in love with her since the beginning of the war. Lilian's death, according to Keller, is the outrage which inflames Louisianans to launch the final offensive which frees them from tyranny. A Democratic government is in power, things calm down, Manning becomes a national congressman, and he and Miriam have children and a happy life. We are presumably supposed to anticipate peace and security for her at this point, but the hope seems a little hollow. After all, the novel has hammered home the message

that life is violent and insecure and that learning to live involves learning to lose.

Although Love and Rebellion is an extreme example, learning to lose is a process common to almost all heroines of novels by Louisiana women from 1865 to 1919. Not only must Southern women learn to lose the age-old feminine battle for autonomy and independent identity, they must learn to lose loved ones, possessions, and status. They inevitably experience conflict between love for those who are responsible for the system which oppresses them and rebellion against the system itself. In this study I attempt to delineate the ways in which Louisiana women used their observations of defeats and enforced submissions as metaphors through which to explore and explain their world and their uneasy relationship to it. I have intentionally limited myself to a regional study. The writers discussed are all Louisiana writers in the sense that they were born or lived for a considerable time in Louisiana. The state was particularly rich culturally, with New Orleans as a literary and artistic center for the South; it was also unusually prosperous, and the transition from wealth to poverty after the war was particularly traumatic. Because of its ethnic diversity, residents were exposed to a wide variety of attitudes toward women, blacks, and miscegenation. I have deliberately excluded Grace King, Ruth McEnery Stuart, and Kate Chopin, the best-known Louisiana women writers in this period, for several reasons. A good deal has been written about them and their

work,<sup>45</sup> King and Stuart are primarily short story writers, and finally, as artists all three are so superior to their contemporaries that a discussion of their works would threaten to swallow up a study of lesser writers.

Louisiana women novelists are, in a psychological if not a factual sense, telling their own stories. The defeat of the South and the condition of slaves and ex-slaves suggest parallels to the education into submission which every nineteenth-century woman experienced. Circumstances after the war encouraged (one could almost say forced) Southern women to question the traditional order, and a major theme is the problem of how to develop a strong sense of personal identity when that identity conflicts with traditional social values or political reality. In this sense, the heroine of mixed blood is a strongly compelling figure, and she emerges as a woman stripped of all social protection. Her peril is the situation of the woman and the slave doubled; she learns to lose it all.

The narrative strategies which Louisiana women novelists use repeatedly to explore their position in the postwar South are significant. For too long, historians have believed that Southern women simply acquiesced to the plantation tradition, glorifying faithful slaves and longing for the days of ease and comfort before the war.

<sup>45</sup>Chopin in particular has enjoyed a well-deserved vogue in academic circles. Helen Taylor, who first introduced me to this group of writers, has just written a dissertation, "Gender, Race and Region: A Study of Three Postbellum Women Writers of Louisiana--Grace King, Ruth McEnery Stuart and Kate Chopin," D. Phil. thesis Sussex University 1984.

Actually, the changes initiated by the Civil War and Reconstruction were, in many ways, far from regrettable for the intelligent Southern woman.

## Chapter Two

### Learning to Live

The Civil War and its aftermath suffused the imaginations of Louisiana women, figuring prominently in almost every novel they produced during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The experience of the war and Reconstruction functions as much more than a backdrop in their fiction; it is a major component of their struggle for self-definition. Catherine Clinton observes that "Planters possessed women in almost the same way that they ruled over their vast estates--small wonder, then, that many southern women felt a powerful identification with the land."<sup>1</sup> Women also, as we have seen, identified metaphorically with the South's experience of defeat and submission, just as Sadie, the heroine of Clip Her Wing; or, Let Her Soar, sympathizes passionately with General Lee: "Her nature, so unused to suppression, rebelliously wondered what feeling it must have cost him to lay down his arms to another. Dividing the heart into two equal parts could not have cost him dearer."<sup>2</sup> Sadie finds out what surrender feels like at the end of the novel, when she gets married.

<sup>1</sup> Clinton, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> [Mrs. J. S. Handy], Clip Her Wing; Or, Let Her Soar: A Novel by a Lady of Louisiana [pseud.] (New York: G. W. Dillingham, 1889).

Similarly, Mrs. M. F. Surghnor equates herself with the South in her extravagant introduction to Uncle Tom of the Old South. She speaks of signs and heavenly portents, particularly of a shower of stars which fell on the day she was born (November 13, 1833). Presumably these signs foretold the Civil War, and she haughtily predicts that "some 'goody' reader of this book, some of those who consider it the duty of the Southerners to forget their memories of the terrible scenes they went through from 1861 to 1876, would say that I was a burning firebrand which dropped down at that time, an outcast from heaven."<sup>3</sup> One doubts that anyone besides Mrs. Surghnor would have made such a connection, but she dwells on it with obvious pride.

The reactions of Louisiana women novelists to the war are individual and complex; but in their use of the war as a subject for fiction they tend to regard it as (1) the Big Adventure which exposes the heroine to danger and temptation, (2) the creator of a feminist society in which women are more productive as well as less egocentric and combative than men, and (3) the cause of total economic and social upheaval. In each case, gain comes out of loss. Repressive conventions are forcibly destroyed, and heroines must learn to live both unprotected and unrestrained. The upheaval is both terrifying and liberating.

Most commonly the terrors of war and Reconstruction subject a normally sheltered heroine to the evil and violence of the world, forcing her to make her own difficult choices. This pattern is admittedly the stuff of nineteenth century melodrama and of those fat

<sup>3</sup> Uncle Tom of the Old South: A Story of the South in Reconstruction Days (New Orleans: L. Graham and Son, 1896-97), p. 3.

paperbacks with the titles in swirly script that succeed each other monthly on present-day drugstore shelves. But perhaps the ubiquity of the device simply suggests that on an elemental level it is tremendously powerful.

A romance needs a conflict to keep the lovers apart for a while or there is no plot. The crises inevitable during war, the barriers thrown up by political division, the opportunities for danger and chivalrous intervention and courageous rescue, and the enforced close contact and nursing back to health and painful separation--all give war romances a believable way to avoid the "duel of sexual stupidity" which Ann Douglas says is the only thing that allows Harlequins to last the prescribed 180 pages.<sup>4</sup>

The young heroine of Marie's Mistake, like countless other heroines, is plunged into a world of violence, suffering, and privation when the South secedes, but the author is more alarmed by her sudden freedom amid the breakdown of rigid behavior codes: "Oh, how can the world and society expect so much at the hands of a woman, surrounded by temptations and snares that even men could not pass through unscathed?"<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the experience leaves Marie less pure but more tolerant. The author suggests that the trade is fair; the loss of innocence is more than balanced by the gain of knowledge and maturity.

A more dramatic example of a war plot used to imperil the heroine both morally and physically is Blue and Gray; or, Two Oaths and Three

<sup>4</sup> Ann Douglas, "Soft-Porn Culture," New Republic, 183 (30 August 1980), p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> [Agnese M. Massena], Marie's Mistake: A Woman's History by Creole [pseud.] (Boston: Pratt Brothers, [c. 1868]), p. 251.

Warnings,<sup>6</sup> an odd novel which pushes beyond the frontiers of melodrama to touch on the issues of political and moral freedom. Vastly overwritten and overemotional, the novel turns its faults into virtues. The book is well-timed and creates strong sympathy for the characters, and its excesses, ludicrous enough taken out of context, make it a real page-turner. Beginning early in the war and running through Reconstruction, it plays effectively upon the fortunes of war to provide dangerous and unusual situations.

The heroine is Jenny June Bancroft, a sensitive young woman in her early twenties who is married to a wicked man many years her senior. He drinks, gambles, keeps mistresses, betrays the Confederacy, is an opium addict, and has married her for her money. Jenny, however, is "brave, good natured, and true to a wife's duty; her bouyant spirits picking out the bright spots on which to plant her fallen hopes, scattering the clouds with a proud and victorious hand, while duty and virtue were her watchword and guard" (pp. 22-23, emphasis mine). That is, they are her watchword and guard until the circumstances of war cause repeated encounters with the handsome Confederate officer Harold Clifton, an aristocratic Englishman who has wandered Byronically all over Europe. He always arrives at times when Jenny needs saving, such as when Bancroft goes into a withdrawal just as the Yankees invade.

Jenny June has difficulty separating the horrors of the war from the horrors of her marriage. When her house burns during the shelling, she has taken a sedative and cannot be awakened, so Harold must carry her outside. On awakening, she exclaims, "It is a punishment for my

<sup>6</sup> Louisiana [pseud.], "Blue and Gray; Or, Two Oaths and Three Warnings" (New Orleans: L. Graham and Son], 1885).



sin" (p. 38). Jenny is given to these grandiose assessments of herself as the chief of sinners; while the sentence is unspecific and may well refer to her having taken drugs (this is a temperance novel), it is quite possible that this heroine is suggesting that the whole war is a punishment for her carefully-concealed illicit penchant for Harold. Harold goes on to draw an explicit parallel between Jenny and the South: "Poor little Confederacy! you and Jenny remind me of each other!" (p. 40). In this equation Jenny's marriage becomes the war, the Yankees are the bad husband, and the refusal of society to allow women a respectable way out of marriage is like England's refusal to recognize the Confederacy. And when Harold muses over his love for another man's wife, he juxtaposes the situation to his having joined the Confederate Army. In fact, the novel becomes an argument for the right to autonomy, and thus to divorce for women and secession for the South. The author, in a typically bitter moment, points out "Union was the watchword-- 'union' was the cry--'Union for ever.' Has it been Union? Is it yet Union?" (p. 47).

Jenny's marriage, of course, has never been a true union either, though the laws of society force her to maintain it. In fact, she remains remarkably faithful considering the temptations she faces. Until near the end of the novel, her worst lapse is to let a flicker of emotion show in her face, when she discovers Harold bleeding to death. But to her it is a sin even to feel illicit passion. Harold is equally cursed with excessive doses of Sunday-school piety. After he has been attacked by blacks and shot in the chest, has escaped by swimming a stream and crawling into an excavation which contains a cache of supplies, he feels guilty for opening some packages of food and bandages

because they don't belong to him. While these scruples seem ludicrous and excessive today, they are quite believable in the breathless context of the novel.

If Jenny is beleaguered by her husband's cruelties, she is equally threatened by Harold's kindness, which is clearly tainted with the musk of seduction. Just when Jenny is on the verge of rejecting her illicit love completely, a new crisis always presents itself: he saves her husband, he saves her, and finally, most effective of all, he saves her children, one by one. The author whips up the emotional waters by alternately warning Jenny--"Oh Jenny, Jenny! take care; you have betrayed yourself; men are wicked creatures. . ." (p. 84) and by cautioning her audience not to judge those carried away by passion: "Cruel compassionless hearts! ah ye scornful ones beware! each of you may yet need your neighbor's better memory to point to the skeleton in your own closets; none can read the future or scan its pages, and cannot tell upon which one there may be already written opposite their own infallible name, 'Fallen'" (p. 92). These lectures seem intended to make the reader of Blue and Gray--like Jenny June, like Marie, like other heroines of war romances--less pure and more tolerant.

When Harold declares himself just before leaving for England, Jenny resists, and God and the angels breathe a sigh of pleased relief. But he persists, and she finally confesses too. He exacts an oath that she will marry him when her husband dies, and that she won't kiss anyone but her children until then. (He won't kiss anyone, and the vow causes him some awkward social moments back home in England.) They embrace passionately; this is as far as Jenny falls.

Whether as punishment or justification, at this point Bancroft changes from a creep to a lunatic. He tears Jenny's flesh with his nails, yelling "Ha, ha, ha! lady love! snow flake! snow flake! you've got blood! blood! I want blood! more blood yet!" (p. 105). As if this weren't enough, he goes after the children with a knife and tries to dash their brains out against the wall. Harold again intervenes opportunely, but this time he needs the aid of two butchers with knives on their belts.

Finally the war ends. Finally Harold goes to England, leaving Jenny "to fight out the fierce struggle as God had intended she should" (p. 118). She turns gray under a new series of troubles too numerous to relate, and the romantic interest turns abruptly to a new couple who better represent the events of Reconstruction. They are Bancroft's niece Maggie (she later turns out to be Bancroft's daughter by a prostitute) and Captain Manley, a Federal officer who appeared earlier. Manley now takes charge of the family and proposes to Maggie, who replies "That she despised Yankees, and wasn't going to give satisfaction to any man, she cared not who or what he was, until women could vote as well as 'niggers'!" (p. 121). It is Maggie who suffers the indignities of being insulted by black women and union soldiers; she goes to school; she identifies entirely with the conquered South and devotes her energies to restoring its freedom. She keeps Manley on the string for years, until finally Louisiana is restored to freedom through her mysterious political influence.

Meanwhile, Bancroft is reported dead, reappears, then finally dies at the home of a prostitute, where Jenny catches yellow fever. But Harold returns, she recovers, and they marry. He inherits a fortune,

and everybody accepts the couple, despite their air of scandal, because they're so rich. When Maggie and Captain Manley go to visit Harold and Jenny, the Blue and the Gray are reunited. The book closes with a plea for tolerance as well as for temperance and peaceful political action. The close identification of the two heroines with the Confederacy provides a forum through which the author explores both the political situation and the plight of women, creating sympathy for the victims in each case. The excessively moral tone serves as a cover for the subversive message: both women and states ought to be able to govern themselves.

In another kind of war novel, women do, at least temporarily, govern themselves. Such novels describe the community of women which develops while the men are away or after they have returned to the devastated land and the ruined economy. The women, both during and after the war, are shown as the workers, the sufferers, the strong minds. A few old women may whine and be unable to come to terms with their changed condition, but they are exceptions and are portrayed unsympathetically. Most women bravely take hold and make do. One plantation (in The New Man at Rossmere) is renamed "Tievina" after the destructive weed that has taken it over.<sup>7</sup> Another (in The Price of Silence) is renamed "Ladies' Rule."<sup>8</sup> Together the two names characterize the plantations in novels by post-war Louisiana women; they are blasted, but tenaciously tended by female hands. Though many

<sup>7</sup> Mrs. J. H. Walworth, The New Man at Rossmere (New York: Cassell, [c. 1886]).

<sup>8</sup> Mollie Evelyn Moore Davis, The Price of Silence (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1899), p. 87.

women faced desperate poverty, some of the most fascinating passages in the novels detail the ways in which they improvised to provide the necessities of life. There is an air of breathless adventure to these accounts, and a wealth of detail which indicates the creative pleasure of their inventiveness. Making a button (perhaps a rather attractive button, too) from a persimmon seed may seem a small enough accomplishment, but such acts worked a metamorphosis on the average lady. Having been a consumer, a shopper who was valuable chiefly as an emblem of the luxury of idleness, she suddenly became a producer, essential to the economic life of her community. She was Robinson Crusoe, dependent on herself, provided with few raw materials and unable to acquire food and clothes by purchase. She may not have understood her condition in such terms, but she felt a creative energy arising from this radical change in her sociological significance. Certainly, as Catherine Clinton points out, the plantation mistress was often a busy and useful woman, but she was primarily a manager. The war made her a craftswoman.

Mrs. M. F. Surghnor, in Uncle Tom of the Old South, describes an aristocratic woman knitting a stocking out of reclaimed silk and goes on to reminisce about other instances of wartime ingenuity:

We have forgotten all those economies now, but how proud we were, in 1864, of our nice tallow candles,--our coffee made by cutting up sweet potatoes into small bits, drying in the sun, and parching it;--of our palmetto hats and corn-shuck bonnets trimmed with the loveliest flowers made of the soft, inner shucks, wild duck and chicken feathers, corn beads and cotton seed, put together by using the wire got off of old brooms. We also made bonnets of wheat or oat straw woven together. We were proud, too, of our corn-cob soda, our home-made starch and soap, our corn meal cakes, our blackberry wine,--but most of all, of our homespun dresses,--we were truly proud of them. Many of us had silks and satins stowed away, but we didn't want them,--a homespun dress was something to show and brag about . . . . (p. 58)

The passage indicates not only that women improvised, but that their productions often extended past necessities to luxuries and that aesthetic impulses often outdistanced need.

Often the superior competence of women is treated in comic terms. In M. E. M. Davis's The Wirecutters a rare strain of frontier humor creeps into accounts of young girls who outdo their male relatives at farming. Lorena Crouch, daughter of a Texas ne'er-do-well, was "a long-legged, soft-voiced girl of sixteen, [and] took after her mother, who, according to common report, was a 'buster,' and between mother and daughter the place was 'run' more or less successfully while Billy [her father] sat on the fence and talked politics . . ."<sup>9</sup> In the same novel we meet the twins Red and Green Parsons. Red has a family of boys and Green of girls, and all do heavy work. A neighbor says, "It's nip and tuck betwixt 'em to see which will do the most. One day it's Red with his troop of boys, clearing up your west field. Next day it's Green and his platoon of girls, planting your east field. The neighborhood, generally, bets on the girls" (p. 362).

Fulfilling as such a feeling of self-sufficiency is, women characters generally take care to shield masculine pride. Uncle Scipio, a former slave in the novel of the same name, remarks that "Folks sez Miss Tildy keeps de house up by sellin' her poultry en her butter en truck. It sho'ly would hu't Mars Frazee's feelin's ef he knowed it" (p. 40). On another plantation in the same novel, a destitute planter's daughters are said to have lucrative "hobbies": "One is the cultivation

<sup>9</sup> The Wirecutters: A Novel (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1899), p. 87.

of small fruits for the northern market. Another is silk-culture. The other makes the best butter in the country" (p. 236).

However they attempt to disguise the fact with euphemism, this is a world run by women. Louise M. Clack's Our Refugee Household<sup>10</sup> deals with a community of women banded together to take care of their children during wartime. There are other similar communities in the neighborhood. The narrative structure is significant; in the first half women are simply waiting, telling stories to pass the time. The novel seems to be a kind of frame story. But halfway through the novel the Yankees arrive in their area and the women flee in wagons, encountering many hardships. There is no more storytelling; the women have their own drama now. The names of the characters emphasize the sororal nature of the community: Pet, Queen, Sister Maddie. Though the self-sufficient women in such novels often find the new roles made possible by the war exhilarating, they tend to view the war itself as a masculine mistake arising from blind egotism. Usually such sentiments are put into the mouths of former soldiers, who can see only in retrospect the folly that drove them to fight. A Southern officer in Atalanta in the South explains simply that he was seventeen when he enlisted, and "I did not know--I doubt if a man in our company knew--what we were going to fight for."<sup>11</sup> An older and wiser Southerner in Uncle Scipio laments similarly that "Those of us who went into the army when we were mere boys were called 'the seedcorn of the country.' Fate ordained that we should turn

<sup>10</sup> Louise M. Clack, Our Refugee Household (New York: Blelock, 1866).

<sup>11</sup> Maud [Howe] Elliott, Atalanta in the South: A Romance (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1886), p. 98.

out to be mere suckers" (p. 208). Others hold that "It was a terrible mistake" or "a grievous error" (Atalanta, p. 97). The war spirit produces meaningless destructive excess, as it does in one the character in The New Man at Rossmere who was so patriotic that he "burned down his own house, with all its contents, books, pictures, pianos, and everything, rather than run the risk of their falling into the Yankee's hands" even though the Yankees never came within twenty miles of the spot. (pp. 34-35).

Such gestures are seen not as laudable but as, quite simply, stupid. If women's dismay at the destruction of war seems to contradict the spirit of Jefferson Davis's fiercely unreconstructed woman, perhaps Sarah Dorsey best indicates how Southern women regared their contributions to the war effort: "The South may have been wrong in the casus belli; but we were not wrong in our self-denial and patriotism. With the politics of our men we have nothing to do. But we were right, very right, to aid 'our own,' even, like our Pelican, with our very heart's blood."<sup>12</sup> War is wrong, but self-sacrifice is right.

Nina Auerbach perceptively analyzes this and other paradoxes that arise in war-generated female communities. She points out that "even to sympathetic observers female communities [unlike male communities] still tend to evoke [a] maimed, outcast image,"<sup>13</sup> an image that is at least partly ameliorated in groups created by the "necessary" disruptions of war. E. Merton Coulter says that after the war women's "power was

<sup>12</sup> Tardy, pp. 111-12.

<sup>13</sup> Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978), p. 7.



great," and that "they came near establishing a matriarchy."<sup>14</sup> By draining away the men, the war gave them this power; as Auerbach puts it,

Union among women . . . is one of the unacknowledged fruits of war. . . . Yet feminists and non-feminists alike claimed that the purity and harmony of her nature, together with her isolation from the greed of history, endowed woman with the unique mission of ending forever the wars that deprived and relieved her of men: the task of the newly banded community was to root out the human evil that was one source of its power.<sup>15</sup>

Wartime communities of women were self-consciously apolitical because they perceived politics as an agent of death. Mary (Molly) Evelyn Moore Davis had relatives on both sides during the war, and her autobiographical novel In War Times at La Rose Blanche<sup>16</sup> reflects this anti-war sentiment. She emphasizes waste and individual nobility, but not collective glory. The men are away at war, and Davis focuses on the ways women and children cope with danger and privation. Women and children, true to Auerbach's model, view the war as meaningless, perceiving similarities rather than differences between the two factions. The first Yankee in the novel eagerly plays dolls with Mary, returning to give her a doll he has made. He is later killed in a battle on the plantation, where Mary's mother has him buried. She associates him with her own two boys, and to the end of the war fresh flowers are kept on his grave. Yankee officers deliver letters to Southern families, and when Mary's father is killed, a Yankee brings his

<sup>14</sup> The South During Reconstruction, 1865-1877. Vol. VIII of A History of the South, ed. Wendell Holmes Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1947), p. 126.

<sup>15</sup> Auerbach, p. 161.

<sup>16</sup> In War Times at La Rose Blanche (Boston: D. Lothrop Company, [c. 1888]).

sword to Mary's mother, weeping as he describes her husband's gallantry. Southern boys are equally helpful to northern females; young cousin Wesley Branscome is soon killed, but not before he has secretly helped an old woman to spin thread so that she can make warm clothes for her own soldiers.

The plantation itself is at the center of this novel, a fertile paradise which is destroyed by the forces of evil. But Davis avoids bitterness, and the devastation itself takes on a languid beauty in her sensuous descriptions. In the midst of these pastoral surroundings, the exclusively feminine society which emerges during and after the war is both biracial and totally harmonious. Black and white women are united by common worries--loved ones on the battlefields, danger at home, and the need to make do with very little in the way of food and clothing. An entire episode, for example, revolves around "dish-rag gourds" planted by Mammy, which the children watch with interest at every stage of development. When they are ripe the women make a bonnet and some dishrags out of the insides, and little Percy slips the bonnet into a box meant for the soldiers, having been told that they are to send their most precious possessions. Everybody has a good time wondering what the soldiers will do with a bonnet.

Distinctions between mistress and slave blur in this feminine world threatened by war. In a striking speech which introduces both historical perspective and social comment, Aunt Rose, an elderly slave, compares her early life to her mistress's: she was an African princess, lived in a 'gret house,' had slaves, and wore diamonds around her waist like ropes. But war came, and the invaders carry off the women and children and make them slaves. She is separated from her five children;

her husband is killed; she is brought to New Orleans and sold as a slave. Rose professes total loyalty to her new mistress, who has never made her feel like a slave. She says, in fact, that the woman is an angel. But her narrative repeatedly draws attention to the parallels between her earlier situation and her mistress's present one, indicating that fortune's wheel may be about to turn again, elevating the lowly and crushing the powerful.

Davis is skillful in her use of pastoral description; without sacrificing verisimilitude she invests the landscape with symbolic significance, using it to evoke the languid post-war atmosphere of defeat. The Mississippi River floods, adding to the destruction of war:

At first the waves, that lapped softly against the basement windows and rippled away over the lawn and sparkled in the hot sunlight, were thick and muddy. But gradually they became clear; then as if in a vast mirror, we could see the soft grass, and the little hedges and rose bushes and the violet beds, emerald-green, waving back and forth with a gentle undulatory motion far below the wind-stirred surface. The partly-submerged rose-hedges bloomed defiantly, their glossy leaves and waxen buds reflected in the clear pool below; the tall cane standing deep in the pool rustled its plummy tufts gayly.

But, after a while, a sickly yellow began to steal over the fields; the hedges strewed the waves with white unopened buds; a thick scum overspread the water and a damp, clinging, curious odor pervaded the air.

We seemed to be living in a strange, new world. Sometimes a fish leaped up near a trellis showing his white glistening sides as he fell back with a splash. Then the little boys would rush headlong into the house for their poles and lines, and they would hang for hours over the bannisters waiting for a nibble. Long, slimy, greenish snakes would coil themselves on the steps to bask in the sunshine, and hardly take the trouble to slide off when anybody came down to the boats moored against the pillars with their paddles laid across. Once, a monstrous alligator glided across the lawn, swimming, his ugly nose in the air, and dived under the rose-garden gate. (pp. 137-38)

Despite the devastation, this passage portrays the remaining beauties of the plantation. It describes a moment of hiatus--the war is over, but the men have not returned. It is a pause during which one can look back to what has been lost, just as the budding roses can be seen through the floodwaters before slime and decay overcome them. Davis, unlike most of her contemporaries, was too good an artist to spell out the connection.

Destructive though it is, the flood, like the war, inspires a temporary community between natural antagonists. After the flood the little boys find a new dog, which no adult sees for several days. When he finally appears he is bringing up the rear of a parade of little boys, walking on his hind legs and wearing a straw hat. Mary's mother almost swoons; the new dog is in fact a half-grown bear, "driven in by the overflow and tamed by the innocent confidence of his little hosts!" (p. 142). But such innocent community is fragile. One day the bear runs amok and wrecks the dining room. Mammy beats him with a broom and he marches off offended, pausing only to take the baby's straw hat from the hall-tree, presumably as a souvenir.

Davis built In War Times around a series of such incidents, all of which show loving and innocent relationships disrupted by the violent intrusion of evil passions. The novel begins with a childish game of Deer and Dogs during which Mary's brother Tom is bitten by a serpent in the garden, a scene which unmistakably evokes the fall from innocence. The same idea is recalled during the battle which rages around the house. The slave Mandy remarks that it looks as though the soldiers are playing Deer and Dogs, but "it's powerful hard to tell which air de deer and which air de dogs!" (p. 92). The combination of these elements forms a metaphor for the feminine attitudes presented in

In War Times: the war is an evil which destroys the fertile South, yet the participants are merely innocents, engaged in a childish and meaningless game.

M. E. M. Davis was often celebrated as devoid of sectional animosity, a quality highly prized by Northern publishers.<sup>17</sup> In War Times was her first novel, and The Price of Silence (1907) was her last. While In War Times is an apolitical treatment of the community of women, The Price of Silence is an example of a third type of fictional reaction to the war, emphasizing economic and social upheaval and the antagonism between social classes. One would scarcely guess that the two books sprang from the same head, for The Price of Silence is as bitter as In War Times is sweet. Her biographer was puzzled by the disjunction, cautioning that "The theme [of The Price of Silence] is not altogether pleasant; the tragedy of color is evoked and only deftly evaded at the close. Not everyone will find the treatment satisfactory. Alone among Mrs. Davis's works this seems to bear some traces of haste in composition." This anonymous critic adds that the villain "may appear unnecessarily detestable, but he is not a Northerner, he is a Southern renegade and degenerate." The book is finally excused as having been written "on a couch of pain" while Davis was suffering from the excruciating (but unidentified) illness that killed her. (She was ill for four years, and nobly "refused all opiates.")<sup>18</sup> Her puzzled biographer was baffled by the angry and political tone of The Price of

<sup>17</sup> In Memorium: Mary Evelyn Moore Davis (New Orleans: Picayune Job Print, 1909), p. 9.; Paul H. Buck, The Road to Reunion; 1865-1900 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1947), p. 209.

<sup>18</sup> In Memorium, pp. 7-9.

Silence; it is anything but nostalgic, and it focuses on the uneasy and inequitable relationship between the aristocracy and the lower classes. Though her illness may account for the bitter intensity of The Price of Silence, Davis's acquaintance with a variety of social levels was probably more important. She spent much of her youth in Texas, and in 1874 she married Major Thomas Edward Davis, the editor of the Daily Picayune. They moved to a historic home in New Orleans. Molly, fascinated with the privileges of wealth and position, began holding salons and receptions for celebrities of all kinds. She infiltrated exclusive Creole society, a notoriously proud group in a city which suffered special humiliation as a result of the war.

Davis's villain is Sidney Cortland, whose father had commanded Butler's provost guard at New Orleans. Many years after the war he comes to the home of Noémie the heroine, carrying a boulder-sized chip on his shoulder. He resents her family's air of aristocracy and his own childhood status as a "poor white," and he has a means for revenge at his disposal. His father was with the marauding Yankee troops who raided the house during the war, and he possesses a stolen letter which indicates that Noémie has a trace of black blood. With it he blackmails Noémie's grandmother, asking \$5000 as the price of silence. He also wants Noémie.

As Davis's biographer nervously observed, Cortland is a despicable character; however, his motivation is always clear. He is despicable precisely because in the Old Order there was no place for him, and he must clumsily attempt to revenge himself and to usurp power in the new. To respect the Old South is to despise himself. But Cortland is violently attracted to aristocracy, so violently that his lust is

destructive. His rival for Noémie is Colonel Allard; when someone says that Allard belongs to one of the old Creole families, Cortland is furious: "I am sick of your old Creole families, your ancien regime, your befo' the wah aristocracy . . ." His companion is shocked: "Lord, Sid . . . I thought you liked it--and them!" (p. 58). The Price of Silence, then, is about class struggle, which in the South is closely related to racial issues. Cortland says to Noémie's grandmother, "I know that if you dared you would call in your servants and have me beaten--as you and your sort used to beat your niggers--and kicked out into the street" (p. 118). The reason for Cortland's hatred is clear: in his mind's eye he sees

vividly projected against the background of shiftless cabin and unkempt field, the motherless, barefoot boy, shunned by his own kind as the son of a 'renegade,' absolutely non-existent for that higher world gathering itself together with patrician insolence from the wreck of the Civil War; jeered at by the Negroes, who held themselves, as always, above his class, and who had, besides, a curious contempt for the Southern man 'turned Yankee,' even to break their own yoke of slavery!" (p. 51)

The Civil War opened up the possibility of democratization, but it did not complete the process. Cortland's anger may well be justified; but, significantly, Cortland chooses to take his revenge on a woman who is both vulnerable and infuriating. Noémie, who is alternately repelled and attracted by Cortland, embodies the mystique of the Old South, so he sets out to demystify her. He says she is a "D---d fine filly" and that he is "Goin' to ride her myself in the nex' rashe" (p. 158). In her presence he is "cowed into decency by that nameless atmosphere which envelopes innocent womanhood," but "Once more out of her sight he would fall into blasphemous rage over what he called his own cowardice, crying

aloud to the empty silence of his chamber his determination to subdue her to his will; to make her fetch and carry like a slave; to beat her as he would a dog" (p. 173). His assessment of the situation is that he can prove that "so far from [Noémie's] stooping to mix her blue blood with that of a poor white, the poor white was going down into the mud to pick up a ---- nigger!" (p. 251). If Cortland cannot demand the privileges of aristocracy, he can subject an aristocratic wife to the humiliations of common people.

Cortland's rival, the chivalrous Allard, traces the fatal letter, which Cortland loses while drunk. To make a very long story short, he discovers that the content is ambiguous. Noémie's mother was merely adopted by a black family, and Noémie is "white as the whitest angel in heaven" (p. 274). A relieved Noémie is rescued from a black convent, where she has fled to spare her family the disgrace, and she and Allard are married. He, to his credit, does not care whether she has black blood or not. Noémie's mother, whom Allard finds in a French convent, is also above questions of race:

"For myself, monsieur, these";--she dropped the precious records one by one upon the small table . . . --"these ravish from me, see you! my father and my mother, and give me in return merely a cold, unvalued fact, namely, that my blood is, as they say in Louisiana, 'pure;' and that the de Laussans have not poisoned theirs by mixing it with that of Gabrielle Verac. I loved my father, Louis Verac, quadroon, mulatto, if you will. For he was my father by everything that makes for fatherhood,--love, tenderness, care, protection, the most loyal heart and the noblest gentleman I have ever known--save one. And he, ah, what did he care whether there were taint in my blood or no? He loved me!" (p. 206).

Indeed, Davis strongly suggests that race, like social standing, matters only to the vulgar and trivial. Both matter to Cortland only because



they have been unfairly used against him. He is not a sympathetic character, and his response to oppression is to imitate his oppressors, an unimaginative tactic which ultimately destroys him. But Davis is attempting through Cortland to understand the democratizing influence of the war. In War Times explains women's immediate reactions to the war; The Price of Silence studies its long-range effects. The aristocracy is threatened by vulgar and energetic humanity, but Cortland is the compelling center of the novel and appears more victimized than his intended victims.

The class struggle in the post-war South is closely related to increasing industrialization, which is symbolized in The Price of Silence by the menacing form of the sugar-refining machine. It is a threatening presence:

The inclined platform into which the shining stalks of purple and yellow cane were flung fresh from the fields mounted endlessly toward the enormous crushers on the second floor of the sugarhouse. Thence, past rushing rivers of grass-green cane juice, along monstrous vats where the boiling juice foamed and seethed beneath overlying clouds of white vapor, around towering centrifugals filled with whirling masses of chemically-changing ooze . . . to the shafts whose mouths were spitting sugar--warm, white, moist--into the barrels on the ground-floor far below. (p. 88)

Noémie, who is really not much more than a symbol herself, sums up the conflict between realism and romance thus:

As a mere woman. . . I disapprove of science in sugar-making, and yearn backward for the open kettle and cuite. As a planter, I am of course ready, after the fashion of my fellow planters, to spend everything I make each year on experimental and expensive machinery for the next (possible) crop. (p. 92)

The machine is almost the end of Noémie, that model of virtuous old-style Southern womanhood. Just as she is threatened by the upheaval of race and class, so she is threatened by industrialization. In a dramatic scene her skirt gets caught in the machinery: "The girl's slight form, drawn after it, was jerked upward; her long hair, loosed from its fastenings, whipped like flames about her face and neck, then shot out as if magnetized" (p. 93). She is saved, again, by Allard, the paragon of aristocratic chivalry, who rips off her skirt in the nick of time. The skirt ominously disappears, "a blackened wad, among the spokes of the flying wheels" (p. 93).

Wheels and machines, the emblems of progress, function in these novels as aids to the strong and killers of the weak. Mrs. J. H. Handy uses mechanical imagery in describing the misguided and fatal attitudes of the weaker-minded planters, who, "seeing the wheel of industry rolling round by the self-made, before the war, absolutely refused to lend their shapely, aristocratic hand as it again revolves upon its axis" (p. 43, Clip Her Wing). She goes on to say that "the highest stamp of man threw aside all such creeds and notions as being unworthy of them and deteriorating to the blood of their forefathers, nobly putting their shoulder to the wheel, revolving it in their turn." (p. 44). The intriguing idea here is that the wheel of fortune is just a machine like any other; it is dangerous to the weak, but those with strong wills and strong shoulders can use it to their advantage.

Sarah Dorsey sees the war and especially the changing nature of the economy as necessarily destructive of distinctive traditional cultures:

Three races were dying out [after the war] in the Southern states. There was the race of the white slaveowner, the

aristocratic gentleman of America. His knell had been sounded. Then the fiat had gone forth against the red Indian. He was to be hunted from off the earth. Then the doom had been written on the wall against the African. He was to be absorbed and to be killed by vice and intemperance, and lack of moral discipline. None but the strong races can survive in this perpetual conflict of humanity. Its issues are good for the world, but individuals suffer in the trampling under foot of this mastodon, Progress.<sup>19</sup>

The only way out of the poverty and waste of the ruined plantation economy seemed to be industrial modernization. Mrs. J. H. Walworth in Uncle Scipio portrays the South "sitting, like Cinderella, among the ashes, while her more favored sisters revel in the light and luxury of the fortunate" (p. 274). And Progress, of course, becomes her Prince; he will sweep her away from the pinched and cruel life she has led (p. 310). Walworth, Dorsey, Davis, and their contemporaries gradually came to feel that the forced dismantling of the old system was for the best, whatever the immediate costs.

Because the old order is repressive in so many ways, the war is by no means entirely a disaster for women. Auerbach speaks of women's difficulty in acknowledging their "gratitude toward 'the shock of battle,'" <sup>20</sup> and such a conflict is indeed evident in these novels. While the war is a cold Northern blast that kills, it is also the wild West wind, destroyer and preserver, that swells the buds and quickens a new birth. It has swept away the old order, and while women must learn to lose both status and fortune, they may also learn to live in new ways, to think about themselves and their roles in new ways. At least for the

<sup>19</sup> Panola: A Tale of Louisiana. Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson and Brothers, [c. 1877]), pp. 215-16.

<sup>20</sup> Auerbach, p. 161.

young and strong, the experience was often exhilarating and liberating.

### Chapter Three

#### The Dual Life

A woman's will dies hard  
In the hall, or on the sward.<sup>1</sup>

The Victorian girl would have been confronted by a dilemma that exists in most cultures: to earn the status of adulthood, a girl child must accept constraints on her behavior, whereas a male child, by growing older, gains more freedom.<sup>2</sup>

When Mrs. Stanhope, the strong but misguided matriarch of Without Blemish, looks at a legal document pertaining to herself, she muses, "Margaret, relict of John E. Stanhope! How queer to think of one's self as nothing but a relic" (p. 17). How queer indeed! Despite the pervasiveness of sentimental myth, women possess both wills and personalities which resist annihilation or absorption. Mental gymnastics are required to live in a world that relentlessly requires self-sacrifice from all women, and most heroines master them. But for women like Isabel Morant of Towards the Gulf, inevitably "there were times when the spirit of unrest and discontent made a fair fight for

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Barrett Browning; used as an epigraph to Frances Christine Tiernan, Valerie Aylmer: A Novel by Christian Reid [pseud.] (New York: Appleton, 1871).

<sup>2</sup> Deborah Gorham, The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1982), p. 95.

possession of [their] soul[s]" (p. 17). Like the women who created them, heroines usually repress anger and frustration, expressing it only in covert forms. Though Isabel seems to be mindlessly tatting away, the author shows us her inner conflict: "While the shuttle flew in and out of her work, it occasionally paused to give vindictive stabs in the air as if battling with unseen foes, and again it fell helpless in the nervous hand that guided it, seemingly born down by the weight of hidden forces" (p. 18). Isabel is first portrayed as a pathetic figure who has lost her fortune and her romantic prospects in the aftermath of the war. She is withdrawn, fearful, unfulfilled, and angry about her uselessness and isolation. She is brought to life by the courtship of Mr. Byrne, in himself a somewhat unattractive creature but at least an agent of change. In honor of the courtship, Isabel gets a new hairdo which works a spiritual metamorphosis:

Miss Isabel appeared so like the wonderful women of the new regime that her heart gave a great throb of pleasure and of pain. She could not resist the impression of loss as well as gain. For years she had confided her troubles to the reflection of a meek, demure, gentle face, with well-brushed bandeaux holding rigidly in check the ears which heard nothing of the outside world or of the prodigious freedom in store for her sex, and now it was gone. It was a companion she had lost.

The gain was something marvelous. (p. 153)

Miss Isabel's awakening may seem to be engendered by love, but it is rooted in rebellion. Its expression through fashion is less superficial than it seems at first glance. The styles of the 70s and 80s, while hardly so unrestrained as jeans and T-shirts, were markedly less restrictive than hoops; the hairstyles of the 60s, smooth and center-parted and covered with demure bonnets, had been designed to make even

Belle Watling look as pure and innocent as Melanie Wilkes. Buckner clearly indicates that for most women, the loss of innocence (and of the appearance of innocence) was welcome, that they would gladly pay the price for self-government.

The price, even for moderate rebellion, was often high. Men control society and its attitudes, and it is they who perpetuate the ideal of the passive yet spiritually superior woman. Mary McClelland, in Mammy Mystic, explains the consequences of a woman's revealing herself to fall short of the ideal:

No man living disputes the strength of woman, or her proficiency in the higher essentials of devotion, righteousness and self-abnegation. So far from it, his standard for her is placed immeasurably above his standard for himself. And when she falls short of it he is amazed, bewildered, and menaced, holding not earth but heaven itself out of joint, and God careless of universal equipoise.<sup>3</sup>

Fiction by women indicates repeatedly that because men cannot take their anger out on God for this disillusionment they are apt to take it out on women. Male attitudes are treated as a destructive force, the most effective barrier to women's sense of self worth, though women themselves are often infected with these ideas. Louisiana women writers after the war were drawn to the task of redefining woman and the way she should behave, but they were always aware that society disapproved of and generally punished departures from the norm. They perceived that society cast women in limiting and demeaning roles which denied their

<sup>3</sup> Mammy Mystic (New York: Merriam, [1895], p. 211.

humanity. For example, in Mrs. J. H. Walworth's True to Herself (1890), a mother and son discuss a young lady whom the son eventually marries:

"I think she is a very handsome animal!"

"Oh, son! don't you think that sounds--well, the least little bit coarse? She certainly is very handsome, and as graceful as a young fawn. I am quite sure she has a docile disposition, her splendid eyes are as mild and gentle as they are big and gray. Mary Agnew says she evidently needs goods [sic] judicious training. Pruning, I should say. There seems to be a superabundance of vitality about her. It seems she has grown up almost wild on the plantation!"

Everard laughed lazily.

"Every adjective and expression you have used in describing our country member, mother, would apply equally as well, if not better, to an unbroken colt than to a young lady, which leaves you and me finally on the same platform."<sup>4</sup>

This short bit of dialogue serves as key to the message of True to Herself, which, as its title implies, gropes toward the problem of identity for women. Like other novels written by Southern women at this period, it is cast as a romance, though its real thrust is far from romantic.

Woman, according to Walworth's submerged plot and use of metaphor, is considered sub-human by society, at best "a very handsome animal." The polite, like Mrs. Ballantyne, express this equation so gently that its implications are almost lost. A woman is a pet--a fawn, a colt, a lapdog--to be cherished, "trained," and pampered. Euphemized in this way, the role sounds palatable, even pleasant. Inevitably, though, a pet is owned. Another of Walworth's novels, Without Blemish, contains this wry description of a marriage:

<sup>4</sup> True to Herself (New York: Street and Smith, 1890), p. 77.



Her husband declared her the best wife in the world. And if it had been the custom of the land to enter one's wife at competitive exhibitions, no doubt Mr. G. Waring Trowbridge would have entered his, glibly cataloguing and demonstrating her superiority to all other contestants, and would have carried off the first prize with that self-laudatory aspect one assumes who considers himself directly and indirectly responsible for the super-excellence of his exhibit. (p. 57)

Walworth here calls up images of the county fair: Trowbridge's wife is exhibited like a prize hog, and he takes credit for her conformation. He is unquestionably proud and affectionate, but she is reduced to an object.

If a pet is docile and submissive, enjoying the master's flattery and attention, then the relationship works out well. But what if the animal refuses to be ruled and insists on living according to its own will? In describing why he has locked up his wife, Isadora, Leslie Davenport, the romantic lead in True to Herself, says "One year of marriage revealed to me the horrible truth that I had married a creature absolutely animal [emphasis mine] in her determination to gratify her own cravings and totally without any moral sense or dignity" (p. 225). He goes on to enumerate her offenses, presumably listed in ascending order of depravity: "Once, a theft was traced to her hands, once, a drunken woman was brought home in my carriage and laid upon my nuptial couch; once, the woman, into whose keeping I had intrusted my honor and a spotless name, was discovered in preparation for her appearance behind the footlights as a ballet-dancer" (p. 225). One does not have to analyze this passage extensively to feel that Leslie Davenport is being portrayed as selfish and self-righteous, an image thoroughly at odds with the heroine's assessment of him as an ideal man.

The plot of the book is conventional, following the traditional pattern in which the good woman (Thersie) is rewarded for her virtue with marriage and a big house and garden. And authorial intrusions often spell out conventional morals. Near the end of the novel Walworth observes that "To serve the man she loves is the sweetest joy life can offer to a true woman!" (p. 283). But the more graphic cry of Isadora, now dead, resonates against this platitude. "I hate you, Leslie Davenport! Take back your name, and give me back my freedom! I am like a dog wearing a collar branded with its owner's name. I have no more joy or liberty" (p. 233). Is Leslie a fine young man or a tyrant and a jailer? The answer is in the key word of the title, true; Isadora is not a true woman because she refuses to suppress her self. If a woman is not an angel, she descends not one rung in the chain of being but two: she becomes a beast. The title, however, points up the almost schizophrenic duality of attitude in the book. True to Herself presumably refers to Thersie, the rather dull heroine who does little but bide her time and look pretty. It is far more applicable to Isadora, who dies seeking freedom from male domination. The cause of her death is carefully chosen; she dies of pneumonia after having publicly exposed herself in a scanty ballet costume.

Violations of feminine propriety were thought in the nineteenth century to disrupt biology, as Lorna Duffin, taking an anthropological approach to Victorian medicine in "The Conspicuous Consumptive," clearly shows. The male-dominated medical establishment, reinforced by society, encouraged the belief that "women would become ill if they tried to do anything outside the female role clearly defined for them," thus

assuring that many women would be afraid to challenge conventional behavior.<sup>5</sup>

On one level, then, Isadora's death represents poetic justice, the bad woman punished for her wickedness. The principle of order is affirmed; bad wives shorten their lives by their very depravity. Isadora is damned not so much for drinking and stealing, which seem to be mentioned mainly for good measure, as for her desire to dance. (One is tempted by the name to claim allusion to Isadora Duncan, whose own scanty costumes and nontraditional self-expression through dance caused great controversy. But Duncan was only twelve years old when True to Herself was published. The name is simply an interesting coincidence.) For Leslie Davenport, Isadora's attempts at public self-expression are the real outrage, the unprovoked injury over which he broods. Isadora is, in addition to her other faults, a murderer. She kills a young black boy in an escape attempt, but this real evidence of her depravity is glossed over in favor of an obsessive emphasis on her dancing. Significantly, too, dancing is the "crime" out of all the others that indirectly leads to her death.

In these novels by Southern women, women who cannot conform to the passive ideal are generally given only two choices. They can die, or they can become artists--dancers, painters, singers, writers, musicians, sculptors. Thus they may gain independence and some measure of material support, but they sacrifice respectability. They find ways to understand and express the world around them while paradoxically

<sup>5</sup> Sara Delamont and Lorna Duffin, eds., The Nineteenth-Century Woman: Her Cultural and Physical World. (London: Croom Helm; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1978), p. 31.

inviting exclusion from that world. Gilbert and Gubar explain that nineteenth-century women writers were struggling to write within a male literary tradition which cast women as either angels or monsters, the angels being passive "total women" and the monsters exaggerated creatures of selfishness and sexuality. Women, despite Austen and Eliot and the Brontës, had no strong female literary tradition to follow or to revolt against, as Gilbert and Gubar have clearly shown.<sup>6</sup> Novels by less skilled writers necessarily rely heavily on formulas and set pieces, for these lend structure and authority by their very familiarity. But one finds that these novels almost burst the seams of such ill-fitting male garments, subverting traditional plots, exaggerating them to the point of irony, adding complexity to portraits of normally flat or stereotypical characters. Much of this revision is probably unconscious on the part of the novelist, who sits down to the blank page intending to advocate ideal womanhood, marriage, and total sacrifice of the self to the family. But the writer's doubts about the imposed order often surface dramatically even while she continues to insist that the novel illustrates, for example, that "All that is true and best in man's nature comes from a Christian wife and mother" (Clip Her Wing, p. 92).

Thus many novels are fragmented and confusing, apparently not so much because the authors were unacquainted with narrative structures (these women above all are facile imitators and avid readers) but because, faced with a number of possible models, all of which are somehow wrong or alien to the stories they want to tell, they cannot

<sup>6</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, pp. 45-92 ff.

choose. The disturbing Clip Her Wing; Or, Let Her Soar (1899) is a case in point. Though its author published under a pseudonym, "A Lady of Louisiana," the book has since been attributed to Mrs. J. H. Handy. Handy may have felt that her reputation would be damaged if she dared to debate the issue implied by the title: should women be domesticated and passive or allowed to follow their own inclinations and pursue their talents? It is not clear in the title whether the wing in question belongs to an angel or a bird, but either metaphor is appropriate. The caged bird motif is used often in nineteenth-century literature and in these novels as a metaphor for the state of the woman and the state of the artist. On the other hand, Gilbert and Gubar discuss the degeneration of the Virgin Mary into the "angel in the house"--the powerful spiritual figure has been demystified in the Victorian period, converted into a kind of cherished pet.<sup>7</sup> But in Clip Her Wing the debate between passivity and freedom is not fully developed. The story line is compelling, but it is buried in an avalanche of pompous wordiness. Clip Her Wing is partly a temperance novel, partly a Christian tract, and partly a romance, and it aspires to being a character study. While the first three elements might be compatible, since all three are formulaic and use essentially flat characters to illustrate a point or act out a pattern, a character study introduces analytical depth, implying complexity, relativity, and objectivity. Handy abruptly shifts gears throughout the novel, providing us with a bumpy ride through the young life of Sadie Marvin.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 22-29.

Sadie is the very pattern of ideal womanhood to her classmates, giving a commencement address on Womanhood which brings tears to the eyes of everyone but the putative villainess of the piece, Inez Clifton. The two women soon become rivals for the love of the hero, Gordon Lindsay. The conventional outcome of such a crisis would be for the man to choose the "good" woman over the "bad"; indeed, Sadie does get Gordon, but only after Inez has (after pages and pages of bad behavior) graciously bowed out. In fact, the remarkable thing about Handy's use of Inez and Sadie as foils is how very similar their characters are. The primary difference lies not in their thoughts but in their actions; Inez lacks control. Her public and private selves are identical, and she says exactly what she thinks. Sadie, on the other hand, has a well-developed public persona. We are told that privately she is contradictory, sometimes quite a saint, the perfect submissive woman, but often "dangerous," cutting, proud, and full of hate. She can get away with this verbal murder, however, because of her carefully-cultivated aura of virtue. She makes people feel guilty and uncomfortable: she strides magisterially into a party and forbids the completion of an eggnog, suggesting that since the eggs are already broken the hosts make an omelet instead. Sadie is one of those people you are afraid to say you dislike because that would reflect on your moral character.

In short, she is just as self-willed as Inez, though far more successful at getting her own way. It is not Inez but Sadie who must have her wing clipped, i.e. learn Christian submission, and the means to this end is clearly her marriage. The bird metaphor is again invoked when, on Sadie's wedding day, her aunt tells her, "If caged, life is

sweetest here--a rest after your freedom" (p. 379). Sadie publicly declares that since "man was given the stronger nature, let him move in advance. I will be content to follow" (p. 234), but her private thoughts are very different. She identifies strongly with General Lee, already the emblem of the defeated South, and she has grave doubts about allowing someone else to tell her what to do.

Sadie is married at the end of the novel, her wing presumably clipped. But she is also making plans to use her talents outside the home, and she asks for her father's help in organizing an industrial school, "exclusively for the poorer children, whose parents belongs [sic] to the poorer classes, and have not the means, time, nor capability to give them the refining influence of a home-life" (p. 262). True, she must ask for male approval and assistance, and she carefully outlines the scheme in the acceptable terms of noblesse oblige and female influence, but the idea is nonetheless radical and her role is assertive. The resolution of the problem presented in the title is thus left ambiguous. We are shown both the contemporary reality--for women at this time, real rebellion against the expectations of the patriarchal culture is social suicide--and a wistful picture of a society which would allow autonomy and free self-expression without exacting a penalty. The connotations of the title alone point toward this interpretation, for who would choose to be mutilated when given the alternative, to "soar" free?

Inez and Isadora belong to a large class known in nineteenth century as "adventuresses," essentially women who act out of selfish motives and hence are to some degree immoral. In one sense they are artistically necessary to emphasize the goodness and purity of the

heroine, but they are more often than not compelling and sympathetic characters who tend to overshadow her. Tania Modleski, in Loving With a Vengeance, a study of contemporary mass culture for women, calls the modern counterpart of the adventuress "the villainess." Her analysis of the intense psychological magnetism of such a character applies equally well to these nineteenth-century creations:

Since the spectator despises the villainess as the negative image of her ideal self, she not only watches the villainess act out her own hidden wishes, but simultaneously sides with the forces conspiring against fulfillment of those wishes. . . . Women's anger is directed at women's anger . . . "8

Certainly a relentless barrage of overt censure is aimed at the "bad" women in these novels, but as Modleski observes, the emotion aroused by the villainess "cannot be defined as one of simple loathing. . . . for it consists of a complex mixture of anger, envy, and sneaking admiration."<sup>9</sup>

A major difference between twentieth-century soap opera villainesses and those in nineteenth-century novels is that the writers of soap opera are to a far greater degree manipulative, playing on their audience's emotional responses for commercial ends, while the authors of the novels often use characters to explore their own conflicts. Thus the villainess of the nineteenth-century novel is more properly an alter-ego or anti-heroine, who says and does what the nominal heroine and the author are too tactful and too well socialized to do or say in

<sup>8</sup> Loving With a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women. (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1982), pp. 97-98.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 33.



their own persons. This anti-heroine almost always ends tragically, but only after she has been allowed to express, with eloquence and passion, her Byronically arrogant but compelling vision of herself as proud, intelligent, and sensitive--and held captive by a society which cannot accept freedom or ambition in women. The plot of True to Herself, for example, is obviously indebted to Jane Eyre, with its imprisoned wife who is an embarrassment to the man who eventually marries the heroine. Like Bertha, Isadora is a projection of the angry and passionate side of her creator. But Isadora is articulate in self-defense; she is not mad, and she tells us why she is rebellious.

In Mary Edwards Bryan's Wild Work, a reconstruction novel, the anti-heroine justifies herself even more convincingly.<sup>10</sup> Floyd Reese, a beautiful and flirtatious woman with a past, is unquestionably the central character, although she shares the stage with two essentially good women, Zoe and Adelle. Though the female characters are all complex to some degree, the men in this book are types, either boring angels or exciting devils, in a mirror image of the usual male dichotomy for women. The central conflict for both Zoe and Adelle is the necessity of choosing between the acceptable, genteel suitor and the driven, hard, materialistic one. In both cases the association is a regional and political one: the good but boring suitor is southern, while the bad but exciting one is a Yankee or participates in Radical politics after the war. Both women in the end opt for excitement, although Adele dies a horrifying death, drugged with morphine so that she cannot protest and sent away by her husband when her illness,

<sup>10</sup> Wild Work: The Story of the Red River Tragedy. (New York: Appleton, 1881).

tuberculosis, begins to "distract" him from politics and farm management. She is deliberately paralyzed in her final illness by a man who perceives her as nothing but a nuisance and a hinderance to his participation in the affairs of the "real" world.

Zoe fares somewhat better; she learns from Adelle's tragic mistake, explaining to a suitor that "I have been thinking what a mad thing it is for a woman to stake her happiness for this world upon a man's love" (p. 164). Her own exciting rogue suitor is Hirne, whose hard, materialistic personality is explained by his terrible war experiences. Two of his brothers were killed in the war, he was imprisoned by the North, Yankees killed his parents and burned his home, and his wife has run off with a Yankee officer. He seeks power in order to protect himself.

Zoe, admirably motivated but naive, says "I think men invented politics as an excuse for endless strife" (p. 285). She rejects the pursuit of power as disruptive of domestic tranquillity. But Floyd Reese, true to her masculine name, utterly rejects the sphere of feminine influence; in trying to escape it, she perverts it. Early in the novel she betrays her married lover Colonel Alver in order to pursue another man, Adelle's eventual husband, whom she sees as a kindred spirit. She soliloquizes about her ambitions:

I was born to rule. I feel the will and the power struggling within me, and yet here I am, ruling two disgusting brats, and perhaps their commonplace father, whose devoted regards can never serve me any further than to keep me in bread and clothes until his jealous wife objects. I must fly for higher game. If I could attach myself to this bold hawk that is preying to such good purpose on my chicken-hearted states-people! Captain Witchell, if I could win your confidence, share your schemes, help you to outwit men, and rise with you to power and riches, it would be all my ambition would crave. It would fill my heart, too--better than love can fill it. Love! Faugh! I have done with love, or I ought to have done with it. It has been my bane: if I touch it again, it

will be to make it my slave--a stepping-stone to power of some kind. (pp. 24-25)

Floyd propositions Witchell boldly, and he rejects her. He proves not to be such a kindred spirit after all, saying that it does not look right for her to be alone with him. She says, "Look right? I thought you disregarded looks. I thought you defied these people." He replies, "You thought wrongly. I want to conciliate them, and gain their confidence and esteem. I want them to feel that I am one of them--that I have their interests at heart, as I have" (p. 37). This essentially feminine strategy is alien to Floyd, who prefers direct and aggressive action. After all, this is a woman who conspired with her overseer to kill her husband, bribing him with promises of sexual favors which she then refused to deliver, and who then let him take the blame. Floyd, an intelligent and essentially competent woman, is portrayed by Bryan as a casualty of a repressive society which allows her no productive outlet for her energies: "This passion for power was a mania with her. It had been her ruin. Since she must rule by the need of her being, she had sought to rule hearts--dangerous and explosive things. Had she been a man, she might have ruled heads" (p. 153).

Floyd's energies are diverted into destructive channels. Witchell's rejection of Floyd prompts her to plot against him. When her elaborate plot fails and her old lover Alver is arrested, Floyd begins to lose her hold on him, but because she realizes that she loves him she does not desert him, a fact which Bryan emphasizes as evidence of her inner womanliness. After a complicated interval concerning Zoe's multiple suitors, Floyd reappears, this time on the stage, having achieved her finest hour by poisoning an actress and taking her place.

This symbolic act of aggressive self-expression seems to finish her off. Alver finally deserts her, declares that she is evil, and returns to his legitimate family and business. Cobb the wronged overseer finally betrays her, and she commits suicide, determinedly in control even of her death. The forces of domestic order are restored, but Floyd, unlike Adelle, has left her mark. She has flaunted her freedom, aware of its dangers.

Adventuresses, anti-heroines, and villainesses, with their compelling stories and their strong ambitions were, like war plots, a convenient solution to the technical problem described by Joanna Russ: "An examination of English literature, or Western literature (or Eastern literature, for that matter) reveals that of all the possible actions people can do in fiction, very few can be done by women."<sup>11</sup> The only thing a good woman can legitimately do is to be the protagonist of a love story, and even then she must suppress her personality. A black woman in Josephine Nicholls's Bayou Triste tells the heroine, Mary, that she must stop talking so much if she wants to catch a man, comically paraphrasing the advice of a famous belle: "When I likes a man I never talks, kase I wants to hear what he's got ter say; an' when I don't like him I ain't sayin' nothin' neider, kase de sooner he sez what's in he mine de sooner Ise done wid him."<sup>12</sup> Mary idly decides to try "the magic effects of stupidity" (p. 76), which work all too well. The young man warms to her immediately and proposes, and Mary is put in the awkward

<sup>11</sup> "What Can a Heroine Do? Or Why Women Can't Write," in Images of Women in Fiction, ed. by Susan Koppleman Cornillon (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green Univ. Popular Press, 1972), pp. 3-4.

<sup>12</sup> Bayou Triste: A Story of Louisiana (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1902), p. 74.

position of rejecting him. This scene is comic, and Mary preserves her integrity; more often, however, the lessons of submission are taught by the rod.

Self-denial learned through hardships encountered during the quest for identity is the theme of Eliza Lofton Pugh's In a Crucible (1872), a complicated exploration of what Pugh calls "dual existence" in the lives of several characters.<sup>13</sup> The epigraph indicates that she is quite conscious of undercutting traditional beliefs: "The high moralties, which are the life of the world, are too often converted into the conventionalities, which are its bane." Pugh makes a greater effort than Handy to confront the problems she raises, but she too often sidesteps deftly at crucial moments. The book is a bitter one, preaching suppression of the flesh, deferral of gratification, and the inheritance of evil. Each of the main characters undergoes a severe test of character; the title refers to this process. As one of the characters, Allan Fenwick, puts it, "Only pure metals are worth putting into a crucible" (p. 18). On a more literal level, the crucible is the Civil War, which in various ways creates a crisis of values for Arthur Moreton, Reginald Moreton, Constance Moreton, Allan Fenwick, and the heroine, Parolet Chandos Trevor. For Constance, and to a lesser degree for Reginald and Allan, the crisis involves class consciousness, and for Parolet it may involve the taint of black blood.

These themes are here closely linked to each other and to questions about patriotism and the morality of the Civil War. But though Pugh explores this tangle of issues, In a Crucible emphasizes sex, how men

<sup>13</sup> In a Crucible: A Novel. (New Orleans: Blelock, 1867), p. vii.

perceive women and how this perception affects the women themselves. The three male leads, Allan, Arthur, and Reginald, all face other pressing conflicts of values, but in each case their uneasy relationships to women receive the most detailed treatment. All three are almost pathologically repelled by female sexuality. Allen and Arthur, both clergymen, are especially inclined to view women as Eves, temptresses who must be resisted at all cost. Though not Catholic, Arthur decides to remain celibate; he vows to himself "to conquer the tide of carnal passions that seethed in the blood of his race, to war with heart and soul against the temptations of the flesh" (p. 23). He soon falls in love, however, and feels the stirrings of sexual passion. For Arthur, sexual desire equals degeneracy, and "he had a humbling sense that in the first real passion of his manhood had mingled the very lowest order of that passion. . . . It had shamed him that he had not been able to divest his passion of its grosser attributes" (pp. 22-23). The woman in the case turns out to be Parolet. For Arthur, women represent the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Allan Fenwick is appalled by Arthur's attitude; he is less rigid in all things: "To Fenwick, woman appeared not under the form of a temptress, but as a co-worker and ministress, and the best gift of God's providence: co-worker in all things: co-equal, save in her weakness, which was the strongest appeal to his sympathy" (p. 27). But what Allan wants to believe about women differs with his instinctive reaction to them. He makes friends with a pretty young peasant girl, Susan Warner,<sup>14</sup> and finds himself tremendously attracted to her. She has been

<sup>14</sup> Susan Warner was the pen-name of one of the most popular nineteenth-century sentimental novelists.

borrowing books from Arthur's library, now under Allan's care, but the two men decide to forbid her to read, believing it will encourage her to be dissatisfied with her station. Susan resents the sudden prohibition, and Allan soon catches her stealing a book. When he tries to counsel her mother to keep her out of trouble (i.e. ignorant), the mother delivers a telling blow: "Ah," she says, "It's yourself you're fearing!" (p. 147). When Susan begins to behave meekly, to play the role of submissive woman, Allan again allows himself to associate with her and to lend her books. Pugh's description of her good behavior is surely ironic, satirizing Allan's rationalization of the situation: "Again, as of old, the woman tempted, and the man fell. The woman, with her innocent, childish aspect--with her heart full of guile--of malicious, gleeful delight at her grateful revenge. He had never again been offended by any exhibition of evil passion" (p. 164). Allan and Susan have what Pugh calls "an idyll," apparently an encounter which is romantic but not sexual. Allan then "comes to his senses" and stops seeing her; her response is to become pregnant by another man in revenge. Of course, everyone blames Allan, who is humane enough to recognize that he has wronged Susan. He sees the situation as his sin although the baby is not his. But he regrets having experienced sexual desire, not having used and hurt another human being. He melodramatically makes a formal confession to both the bishop and his mother. But it is Susan who pays the price; he does not marry her, and she is quickly packed off to the country to avoid a scandal.

Susan Warner, who later turns out to be Parolet's sister, is not mature or intelligent enough to be a tragic character; she is simply a victim. But the real center of the book, Parolet Chandos Trevor, is a

woman who fascinates not with naive freshness but with her penetrating intelligence, strength, and "muscular beauty" (p. 170). She is married to a Captain Trevor, a match made by her family for financial reasons, but at least two men, Arthur and Reginald Moreton, are obsessively attracted to her despite the disturbing fact that she violates the ideal of womanhood in so many ways. It is Parolet who is the subject of Arthur's youthful attack of lust, and he comes in contact with her repeatedly in the course of the novel, always shaken by his involuntary sexual reaction to her; Arthur sees "sensual passion" of any kind as "a crime" (p. 161). His brother Reginald is a cooler, more sophisticated character who is able to take a more analytical look at Parolet's character. In fact, the first time they meet he draws up a balance sheet on her:

PRO

Fine head. Prominent organs of intelligence.  
 Given to thought and study: rather systematic than rapid.  
 A woman who would work up well, patiently and untiringly in the face of obstacles.  
 Mind, body, and conscience working harmoniously.

CON

Intellect not the predominant development.  
 Likely to be acted upon by moral or immoral tendencies; balance--  
questionable.  
 Organization delicate. Subject to unaccountable depressions.  
 Nature exceptional and abnormal.

He says, "The preponderance is against her. Will she work out the problem?" (p. 57).

This arrogant act allows Reginald to control his emotional response by creating intellectual distance and reducing the fascinating woman to



an object of study. Reginald, like the other men in In a Crucible, has firmly fixed ideas about women in general, though he is more intellectual and unconventional in his approach:

[He] had a high belief in the spirituality of woman's nature--a spiritual elevation not trampled down by sin, as a man's was. He knew that the Source whence she drew it had not denied it to her, even after the commission of sin: that there were many women whom social degradation had not made evil; who, removed from the strength of conventional barriers, had yet sought after better things as naturally as plants turn toward the light" (p. 156).

Reginald has a romantized notion of feminine nature, but at least he does not regard those who fail to live up to the ideal as automatically evil. He is therefore better equipped to appreciate Parolet's exceptional qualities than are the other men in the novel.

At length Parolet and Reginald are thrown together on an emergency mission; Reginald accompanies her on the train to the bedside of her dying husband, and on this harrowing journey, complete with train derailment, he recognizes the depth of his attraction to her--while she is asleep. Here Pugh spells out the male response to the woman rendered ideally passive by unconsciousness:

After a long while he bent down and scrutinized her face more closely. He had never seen it in so attractive a light. It was sweeter and softer than he had imagined possible. In sleep, perhaps, it was nearer to God and nature. It was too self-reliant, often, to please him. Now, it was the tender, gentle face of dependent, unprotected womanhood, and the man's chivalry came to his aid. (p. 188)

Reginald wants power over Parolet; her self-reliance and independence fascinate him but make him uncomfortable. She relinquishes her self in sleep, and suddenly he finds her attractive.

Parolet remains an enigma to both Arthur and Reginald, concealing her stormy emotions behind a carefully maintained mask of calm. Significantly, her emotional trial is increased--perhaps symbolized--by the terrible secret of her mysterious ancestry. Her father, Cecil Chandos, was a gambler, who named her for the doubled bid in faro. Just after her marriage to Trevor she is given a hint of some inherited stigma; she sets out to find out the details and to confront her identity, and she charges poor, lust-tormented Arthur with doing the necessary research. The exact nature of this inheritance is left vague. Probably the omission is intentional, for the book belabors every other point. Chandos has sired a bastard in America, the family is prone to suicide, and there is a hint that both tendencies may result from mixed blood. At any rate, identity, both ancestral and personal, is Parolet's problem throughout the novel. She is above all intelligent and so is unable to be the pure and unselfconscious conventional heroine. She hates her husband; on the way to his deathbed, she is honest about her own feelings:

His death released her from a dreary bondage--one under which her soul had sickened and grown faint. She had often longed, passionately, for freedom, as a captive bird struggles in the toils of the fowler. She had fought down her repinings--had rendered gentleness and obedience--had won patient smiles to her lips; but she had shuddered under the leprous taint of her unholy bonds. (pp. 182-83)

Later, while she waits for her husband to die, the allusion to Eve returns, interwoven with sexual desire and the desire for freedom:

Through those intervening hours where, beyond the Marah of thought, hung apples of forbidden fruit, and where, beyond the restless desire of the future, Death stood mute, lay a chasm of unbridled fancy! Steeped to the lips in vast longings for impossible things, she ceased to remember that the fruit she clutched would turn to ashes in her grasp--apples of Sodom, rotten at the core, dust and ashes. (p. 243)

All of these feelings occur to Parolet at a time when the worst that can be said of her husband is that he is dull, or "blank" (p. 59). Shortly afterward, however, Parolet's instinctive repugnance seems justified, for Trevor confesses on his deathbed that he has been unfaithful and sired an illegitimate child. He asks her to provide for his mistress and her child out of his estate.

After Trevor's confession, the twenty-six year old Parolet experiences a rather surprising crisis considering that she never loved Trevor, has been willing his death, and has been covertly lusting after Reginald. She feels she can never forgive her husband, she has lost all her illusions, and she falls ill, resolving at last that "she must summon nerve, and fortitude, even at the cost of all that is most gentle, most lovely and loveable in woman" (p. 256). A long disquisition on duality, the Real vs. the Ideal, follows. Though phrased in vague and general terms, it seems clear that the heart of the issue for Pugh is a very specific one--how a very real, very complex woman can learn to live in a society which casts her as either pure, passive, and asexual or as a mistress who is allowed her sexuality but given no social or economic security. Parolet is always presented in

terms of duality. Her name represents a doubled stake at cards; when she receives the packet of letters which reveals the undisclosed secret of her ancestry, Pugh says that "a double misery was hers" (p. 106). She is both an intellectual and a sensualist. Pugh says of her, "In this woman, whom I have selected as presenting more than the ordinary number of salient points, a close observer might have traced two natures . . ." (p. 182). And Reginald, her lover, sees her as a balance sheet, the two sides at war within her. She is always struggling to conceal a part of herself, to reveal only the Parolet who is passive, calm, and acceptable.

For Pugh there is no satisfactory resolution to such a conflict, and the conclusion of the novel is grim, ending in death for both Susan and Parolet. Parolet has discovered that Susan was her husband's mistress. Susan's baby dies, and she and Parolet travel from the North to New Orleans together on a steam boat. They have a wreck, and as Parolet tries to push Susan to safety she sees an onyx seal on a chain which identifies her as her sister. Susan dies; Parolet is paralyzed. The recognition of their sisterhood is important, as is the fact that Parolet's husband is the cause of Susan's ruin. These intimate entanglements point up their essential kinship, their sisterhood in the larger sense: both are victimized by male attitudes. Their fates are also symbolic. Less self-aware, Susan simply dies, a merciful fate in comparison to her sister's. Parolet, too intelligent and assertive to live comfortably in society, is paralyzed, made involuntarily passive. Her fate is typical for a nineteenth-century heroine: Modleski remarks that "At the end of a majority of popular narratives the woman is disfigured, dead, or at the very least, domesticated. And her downfall

is seen as anything but tragic."<sup>15</sup> Indeed, in forced passivity Parolet is allowed to find approval at last. Just as Reginald was earlier able to see her as attractive only when asleep, Arthur, a Frenchman named Bujac, and Reginald all come to her bedside and confess their love now that she is rendered less dangerous. Like the heroines of earlier sentimental novels, Parolet gets a lot of emotional mileage out of her prolonged deathwatch. At last all question of sex is removed, and her admirers can love without fear of contamination. She and Reginald have "one brief hour of happiness" (p. 374) knowing they love each other, and she dies in his arms. Her death converts the cold, dashing Reginald into a man who renounces the world, nurses the sick poor, and turns his ancestral home into "an almshouse for lame Confederates" (p. 387).

The moral of this tale, Pugh asserts, is that "Self is the great stumbling-block; and until we lose sight of that, we can accomplish nothing" (p. 388). But this sentiment is put into the mouth of Arthur Moreton, the least mature of Parolet's admirers, who grows very little in the course of the novel and who accomplishes nothing, neither going to war nor getting the girl. Arthur is prevented from living by his own fear of sexuality and self-examination. Thus the sentiment is undercut, and the dramatic thrust of the story seems to suggest an inverse moral: Lack of self-knowledge is the great stumbling block, and until we can see ourselves clearly, apart from the expectations imposed by society, we can accomplish nothing. For a woman like Parolet, the situation is further complicated, for if she acts openly in accordance with this self-knowledge, she will be shunned--or paralyzed--by society. For men

<sup>15</sup> Modleski, p. 12.

and women the lessons of reality are different. Arthur himself emphasizes this division of experience early in the novel, asking Allan:

"How far can general rules be applied to individual cases . . .? If you and I, with the common tie of sex--with only its varying modifications--look upon things in such a totally different light, how draw any parallel between my moral and spiritual responsibility, and that of a being totally unlike in physical, mental, and organic structure?" (pp. 160-61)

For male writers, initiation stories are fairly straightforward; the hero discovers himself and his ability to confront reality and the presence of evil. For female writers, the initiation process involves a realization that social reality requires them to learn submission and selflessness at the very time when their natural instincts prompt them to establish a separate identity, and that they must develop a bland façade to hide an unacceptably assertive personality.

Pugh's biography suggests that she led an unfulfilling and unhappy life that she sought to understand and transform in writing fiction.<sup>16</sup> Her promise to "relinquish the pen should a word of reproach from those she loves" be uttered, quoted in Chapter I, gives a hint of the dual life that she herself must have struggled to maintain. She was obviously anxious to allay any criticism that might arise from her defiance of convention, but she must have been constantly terrified that the word of reproach might be uttered and that she might have to make good on her promise. Writing seems to have been one of the few bright spots in a life marked by isolation and illness. She was a plain, even ugly woman, but she married at seventeen the son of a famous Louisiana

<sup>16</sup> Biographical information is from Tardy, pp. 294-97.

judge. Marriage increased her isolation instead of relieving it; she wrote secretly to diffuse her loneliness. Her biographers, true to Victorian form, coyly sidestep any direct mention of unhappiness or instability, but the facts suggest that her husband married her for her money and that she felt smothered by her gregarious and well-known father, who died before she began to publish. A teacher remarked not only on her brilliance but on her physical unattractiveness, traits which are the strongest elements in the heroines of her fiction. The flesh is an obsession for Pugh; her women are not beautiful or submissive, but exert an intense and disturbing sexual magnetism which both terrifies and mesmerizes men.

Pugh's first novel, Not a Hero, was published in 1867. While it lacks the unity, focus, and intensity of In a Crucible, strong similarities of plot and character in the two books suggest that they reflect Pugh's world-view. Not a Hero is centered on Stanley Powers, a despoiler of women's honor who is nevertheless attractive, intelligent, and a kind of literary mentor for the two aspiring women writers in the novel. Powers's established mistress is Janet Somers, an artist and writer. She is a strong woman, old and not beautiful, but men fall obsessively in love with her throughout the novel. Powers loves her above all others, but he is repeatedly unfaithful. A second strong, intellectual woman, though much younger, is Judith, daughter of Rachel Grant. Rachel has been turned out many years before by her husband, who mistakenly believes that she has had an affair with Powers because he overheard him attempting to seduce her. Posing as a governess, Rachel returns many years later to see her daughter, who believes she is dead. Judith, scorned by a man she loves, marries another. She

immediately regrets the match but submits cheerfully, though Pugh notes that "to a happier woman would have belonged some wifely rebellion . . ." (p. 90).

At this point, Powers comes to visit and sees Judith's discontent. Rake that he is, he cannot resist capitalizing on it. When he seduces intelligent women, Powers appeals to their literary ambitions, posing as a mentor who will show them how to live as well as how to write. Just as he had earlier advised Janet to first live her passions, then write about them, he suggests that Judith write as therapy: "Write a book. Make yourself the heroine, and you will forget that life holds more real troubles than those from which you so dexterously extricate her" (p. 101). Judith is totally captivated, but after a great deal of agonized discussion is dissuaded from leaving her husband; the best argument is provided by Rachel, who comes forward to reveal herself and to declare Powers's responsibility for her own ruin. Judith is able to see the implications of her own situation by comparing it with her mother's, and Rachel pleads with Powers not to ruin her child as well. Again, Pugh uses the belated discovery of literal kinship to suggest a metaphorical kinship of women exploited and discarded by men. The identities of these wronged women are unknown or disguised until their sisters or daughters are able to see that the pattern of male brutality which causes their fall is a universal one which has repercussions for all women.

Pugh's solution to this problem is not a happy one, though perhaps it is realistic. Again, she advocates losing one's self in work and sacrifice, suppressing both the flesh and the ego. And again the war provides a reason, a cause, for sacrifice. The novel ends with the



outbreak of the Civil War and the gallant death of Powers. The three younger heroines, Judith, Janet, and Elinor (who has throughout counseled Judith to keep to the straight and narrow path) all follow the men to war and serve as nurses. And the war finally gives Judith a reason to love her husband. When he is a mere wreck, wounded in battle, he becomes significant at last: "He was sacred to her now!" (p. 130). He takes on meaning as a sacrificial victim; he represents the cause.

Like the sentimental novelists before her, Pugh seems to have been unable to conceive of a successful romantic relationship in which both partners are healthy and physically intact. Somebody has to be incapacitated. Perhaps this repeated motif is a literal projection of an emotional truth that Pugh had observed operating in her own marriage and those of her friends, family, and neighbors: one partner always dominates, and there is no such thing as equality in love.

Like Pugh, Martha Caroline Keller traces the career of an assertive, passionate, and intelligent woman who is forced to learn the Christian lesson of selflessness by a rough life. In The Fair Enchantress a very studious young girl, Mora, receives a letter saying that she must leave the convent because her mother has been murdered, just as her father had been earlier.<sup>17</sup> Distinguished Erle Kingsley takes Mora and her little sister Lillian in as wards. Netta, also his ward, is jealous, and poisons Lillian. (She thinks Mora, who is ill, will die anyway.) Later she tries to poison Mora, and is discovered by Erle. Mora pleads for her, and Netta and her mother are sent away. Mora goes North as governess to a sensitive young boy named Shelley

<sup>17</sup> The Fair Enchantress; Or, How She Won Men's Hearts (Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson, [1883]).

Cluis. Two men, Sir Guy Lindsay and Erle Kingsley, are in love with Mora, though neither tells her. Instead, Kingsley promises to intercede with Mora for Lindsay after a stated period has elapsed. Meanwhile, against this backdrop of medieval courtship ritual which curiously disregards the woman, Mora is becoming an intellectual, discussing philosophy with a group of men which includes Sir Guy. She is convinced that there is no God, that life is all blind chance. Using a pseudonym, she writes a book which is acclaimed all over the country. But this literary fame never seems very real to Mora or to her creator, almost as though Keller could hardly even imagine such success. Sir Guy is patronizing in his intellectual interest in her; he simply wants her to return to her post as Shelley's governess.

Instead, unlikely as it seems, Mora writes an opera based on her own life. It is performed by a great opera company whose male lead is the man who murdered her parents (she has tracked him down.) The opera casts him in his real-life, murderous role. At the last moment Mora arranges to stand in for a famous prima donna, and the murderer feels great remorse, recognizing himself in the role. The opera and Mora are a great success, though these scenes, too, are flat and unconvincing.

After this artistic triumph on the New York stage, we are abruptly pulled back to domesticity. Kingsley proposes to Mora for Lindsay and she rejects him. A relative returns home with a tale about the despicable Netta, who married for money only to find out too late that the groom not only was poor but had deserted an earlier wife and two children, had become a Catholic priest, and then had been excommunicated. This man's real name is the Rev. Dr. Cluny, he is now an Episcopal minister, and he was driven mad by the need for money.

Mora suddenly realizes that she was the one who held and foreclosed the mortgages he had expected to pay off with Netta's money. She interprets this apparent coincidence as a kind of poetic justice, an indication that perhaps life is not all blind chance after all.

Mora, like many other strong and intellectual women in these novels, is an atheist. Her interest in philosophy centers around the idea that a God could not permit the kind of suffering and evil she has experienced. Despite her atheism, Mora is constantly engaged in good works. Her life involves a series of philanthropic events. She wants to establish a school for the poor, and she gives poor children money for education out of her earnings as an author. She then goes on to nurse in the yellow fever epidemic in New Orleans in the summer of 1878. At this point Kingsley has disappeared, and his best friend from college, Orrick Graham, proposes to Mora. He also tells her that Kingsley has secretly been married to Netta. They convert Kingsley's house into a fever hospital. Netta and her husband, who is also the murderer of Mora's parents, die there of yellow fever. Before her death Netta reveals that

[Cluny] had murdered Mora's parents that he might administer on the estate and swindle the children out of their property. In early life he had belonged to an opera company, and afterwards had returned to the stage to earn the money he had expected to obtain by his marriage with Netta Burbank. Throughout his career he had constantly been committing crimes for money. He had played the part of a Protestant minister to marry Netta to Erle Kingsley, whom they duped for his money, Netta paying Cluny ten thousand dollars out of the settlement made on her by the swindled bridegroom. Thus Mora learned that there had been no legal marriage between her guardian and this woman, who, later, had legally married old Cluny, thinking him rich, he on his side, imagining that she had increased instead of spending her wealth. (p. 303)

The chain of coincidences, the interwoven motives, suggest that life is not blind chance, but a tangle of human passions.

This denouement accomplished, Mora decides she loves Graham and promises to marry him. But he and her beloved pupil Shelley both fall ill on the wedding day and die; Shelley's mother dies of shock; Mora has lost everyone. At this point we learn that Mora "had after twenty-three years given up the struggle" (p. 325) and been converted to a belief in Christ. Erle returns to marry her. The conclusion of the novel is worth quoting, if only because it is typical of many of these novels:

Here was the reward of all her bitter struggles, of all her untiring and fearless efforts to do her duty as a daughter and as a woman. Memories of the past might sadden her, might bring tears to her eyes and pangs to her heart, but they would make her happy future only the happier, for they would bind her closer to her husband, and realizing what she had lost, she would also realize what she had gained. The clouds would still be there, but far away at the horizon's verge, sombre in the distance; they would purify her life, sanctify her orphaned existence, and, by contrast, intensify her joys. She had abandoned all hope in this world, and looked forward only to Heaven and God's love; but suddenly she had awakened as if from a dream; she had, at last, found Heaven on earth and God's love manifested as the love of man. Her cup of bliss was, indeed, full.

What does The Fair Enchantress mean? Why would Keller present her heroine with such an awful, violent set of associates? I believe that the novel explores the violent conflict between the ideal passivity expected of women and the need to have a voice, an identity, freedom. Mora is both intellectual and artistic; she carves out success for herself in both fields. Yet, like the women authors of the period who presented to the public carefully constructed feminine images of themselves, she spends a good deal more energy on philanthropic, benevolent acts like nursing and educating children than on intellectual

pursuits. And she always has a good excuse for the assertiveness of writing and performing: she does these things not for personal glory but to avenge her family's murder. Mora is rewarded with marriage only because she has learned to be a good loser, and thus to be a good wife.

The women in these novels are often presented in terms of duality, whether divided into heroine and anti-heroine or presented as women who struggle with inner conflicts. As Modleski points out, "The narrative structures which have evolved for smoothing over [the tensions in women's everyday lives] can tell us much about how women have managed not only to love in oppressive circumstances but to invest their situations with some degree of dignity."<sup>18</sup> Perhaps Parolet says it best. In a verbal battle Reginald accuses her of being deceptive and difficult to read. She replies, "I plead guilty . . . if to be false is to dissemble from the cradle to the grave. To play a role and play it well, is all that is left to most of us. You are to blame for it after all; you leave us no other ambitions" (p. 50). Faced with a society which casts them as either angels or devils, women must find strategies which allow them to retain some measure of self-respect.

<sup>18</sup> Modleski, pp. 14-15.

## Chapter Four

### Victims and Victors

Many novels by Louisiana women depict heroines engaged in an internal struggle between ambition and the desire to conform to the ideal of passivity. They question male assumptions that the only possible roles for women involve extremes of goodness or badness, but those novels which focus on the internal conflict generally suggest that no real resolution is possible. The authors seem unhappy with traditional female roles but not entirely sure that they should be abolished. As we have seen, some portray a heroine who is secretly unable to conform to the ideal but who eventually learns self-renunciation, while others use a heroine and an antiheroine as foils, the two sides of the female personality projected onto two women whose values are at odds.

Other novelists approach the issue by casting women either as clear victims or as clear victors. Both types of story arise from a perception of social reality in which the relationship between the sexes takes the form of a battle. Such stories, while they have exciting plots, lack the psychic tension of the "duality" stories because the enemy is obvious and the battle externalized. The heroine is generally sure what she is up against: men. Novels that show women as eternal victims are negatively feminist, casting men as evil persecutors and attacking male brutality in its least subtle manifestations. They have

their roots in the earlier sentimental tradition, which had spawned innumerable novels in which women and children lingered on death-beds while their persecutors repented. Later "sensation" novels added further refinements to the melodramatic persecution formula. Victimization, in the popular novel, was often translated into martyrdom.

Victimization novels, for Louisiana women, generally take the form of the "bad husband" plot. Francis Gaines states with confidence that

In all the romance there is a conspicuous absence of the psychology of lovely girls who married . . . and found that matrimony locked a door and threw away the key, locked a door so thick that not even the cry of pain could ever penetrate to the outer world. . . . Nor does the plantation idyll take cognizance of those waters of deep agony through which passed many a spotless Southern woman as she became slowly and unwillingly aware of the loose morals of her men.<sup>1</sup>

Louisiana novelists, however, do not shy away from depicting bad husbands and bad marriages. Tania Modleski has commented on the widely divergent critical interpretations of the domestic novel, pointing out that some literary historians see the stories as idealizing love and marriage, while others view them as stringent critiques of domestic life. Her explanation of this wild difference of opinion is that some commentators (most notably Herbert Ross Brown)<sup>2</sup>

tend to take at face value the novelists' endorsement of the domestic ideal and ignore the actual, not very flattering portraits

<sup>1</sup> Gaines, pp. 180-81.

<sup>2</sup> The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1860 (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1940).

of domesticity which emerge from their works. . . . they were primarily concerned to show how far short of the ideal most marriages in real life tended to fall.<sup>3</sup>

How one interprets texts produced by women often depends on whether one believes what novelists say or what they show. The very prevalence of bad husband plots indicates that women feared victimization within marriage.

The impact of the bad husband plot hinges on the frightening permanence of nineteenth century marriages. While it was possible for a woman to get a divorce, the social consequences of such an action were so dire that almost any cruelty a husband chose to dispense might seem preferable. Take the case of Lilla Hilliard Deerford, the woman who dares to get a divorce in M. E. M. Davis's The Wirecutters. The divorce, for which "the most rigid moralist, indeed, could hardly blame her" (p. 9), "should restore her to freedom, but . . . on the other hand might condemn her to a lifetime of mortification and wretchedness" (p. 2). When Lilla receives the decree of divorce she puts on a wreath and a girdle of crimson rosebuds, which "glow . . . like molten embers against the dead black of her gown. She look[s] suddenly barbaric and splendid." She says, "I have gone out of mourning! I am celebrating the happiest moment of my life. I am Lilla Armstead once more, and I am free--free--free!" (p. 11).

Lilla faces the challenge with style, but most women were unprepared for the risks of divorce. Catherine Clinton explains that "Southern custom expected a woman to stay with her husband in spite of

<sup>3</sup> Modleski, p. 22.



maltreatment" and that "a wife's inability to coexist peacefully with her husband was no legal ground for divorce; rather, Southerners censured women for acting on such inability." Clinton cites reports of two antebellum incidents where a wife was censured for leaving her husband, one describing the husband as "maniacal." Both judge the woman harshly; one says the wife "must be deranged."<sup>4</sup> Blame automatically rests on the woman, who ought at least to have the decency to suffer in silence.

We have already seen examples of bad husbands, including the "maniacal" Bancroft in Blue and Gray and Captain Trevor in Pugh's In a Crucible. Walworth's Dead Men's Shoes portrays an evil man, Dr. Regnard, who marries a wealthy widow and then systematically attempts to poison her entire family.<sup>5</sup> These cases indicate that bad husbands tend to be considerably older than their victims, their age increasing their authority and power. Marie, in Mary Stempel's The Finished Web, is only sixteen when she marries Valance Stanhill, who is thirty-six.<sup>6</sup> He "thought it right to absorb his wife," refusing even to let her see her parents. He "took it for granted that she would be his slave" (p. 10). The only person she is allowed to associate with is her husband's best friend, the Frenchman Alfred Critien, who wins her confidence. Marie's husband walks in on them one night when she is tearfully rejecting Critien's advances and automatically assumes not only that she

<sup>4</sup> Clinton, p. 80.

<sup>5</sup> Dead Men's Shoes (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1872).

<sup>6</sup> The Finished Web: A Novel by M. G. T. [pseud.] (New Orleans: Current Topics, 1892).

is in love with his false friend but that Marie's baby is Critien's: "He always believed woman to be to blame in such cases" (p. 11).

Marie is put out into the street, torn from her children, but she finds comfort in believing herself to be a martyr whom God will avenge. She finds employment as a nurse, "suffering unmerited crucifixion, as are many others of her sex today" (p. 14). Years later she arrives back home to nurse her grown-up son. She conceals her identity, shares the family's misfortunes, and gains her daughter's confidence. Valance, it seems, has told his children that their mother is dead, and he has been cold and cruel to the son, whom he believes to be a bastard. Margaret, with unconscious irony, confides to her disguised mother that

Men can be faithful; there is my father, for instance; my mother's memory is so precious to him that he can never bear to speak of her. . . . The one redeeming point in his whole nature to me is his reverence for my mother's memory. (p. 33)

Valance Stanhill really has no redeeming feature. He cannot bear to speak of his wife because he irrationally believes that she has been unfaithful. He knows she is not dead; he also knows that he has destroyed her life.

Presumably because she has aged, Valance Stanhill does not recognize his wife, even though she stays with the family for years. But when Marie dies, Margaret finds and reads her diary, and all is revealed. The daughter confronts the father, who repents tearfully upon reading the truth. He cuts in the new plaster of the tomb, "Marie, beloved, honored wife of Valance Stanhill" (p. 44). The web is finished. His repentance is touching, but it doesn't do poor dead Marie

much good. Patient Griseldas ever win hollow victories; women in these novels seem fated to take the blame and pay the price, while men suffer for their wrongs only momentarily.

Valance Stanhill does evil primarily because of his rigid prejudices about women. But Captain Luzerne, the husband of another persecuted Marie, is dissolute and immoral. Marie LaFourche, like Marie and Margaret Stanhill, possesses "that curse of our sex, faith in man," a "delusive dream which wrecks the happiness of nine-tenths of the women" (p. 63). Marie's Mistake is full of such bitter rhetoric.

Agnese Massena emphasizes the unfair necessity that women lead a dual life:

Oh, how often is this cross laid upon woman in the first circles of society! She not only has to bear her terrible burden of sorrow, but has to hide it from the world, by acting a part, wearing a smiling face, when bitter, scalding tears would be more in consonance with her feelings. . . . Yet if she does not enact her part successfully, scandal, with its ever-venomed tongue, will rend aside the fair veil with which she has sought to guard the portals of her heart, and what should be the sacred precincts of her home; and she will have her sensitive heart continually lacerated by being compelled to bear the stings of scandal from which she is unable to protect herself. (pp. 108-09)

Women are doomed to victimhood, and society victimizes them even more if they complain about their fate.

Marie is pursued and married for her money by Captain Luzerne, an older man who already has a mistress. Massena explains that her vehemence on the subject results from personal experience with such betrayal. Indeed, her assessments of the female lot are angry and anti-male; obviously she believes that women were not really meant to be martyrs, avenged by God or not, and that they deserve better treatment.

She warns idealistic young women that

Truly woman's happiest days are those which commence with her debut into society, and end all too soon after her marriage. From the moment she is aroused from the deceptive dream, her only pleasure must be found in the automaton-like discharge of a continual round of duties, her whole life, in fact, must be offered upon the altar of a husband's selfish pleasure, and as a compensation, to receive her services when approved of with indifference, and when they happen to be displeasing, not to fail to censure. (p. 30)

Marie, in fact, does not have unreasonable expectations about the joys of married life: she tells a friend that all she asks is "that he will control his terrible temper, treat me kindly, and by doing so permit me to love him" (p. 120). Unfortunately, even as she speaks Luzerne is "On board his ship, clasped in the impure, unholy embrace of Julie De Bourghe, and listening to her burning words of passion" (p. 125).

A neighbor tells Marie about Luzerne and Julie and makes sure she sees them making love. Marie's love for her husband is destroyed, and she is totally unforgiving. If her first mistake was to stake her happiness on a man's love, her second is to refuse Luzerne a second chance, "heartless betrayer of innocence and virtue" though he is (p. 126). Her heartlessness drives him back to the arms of Julie. After a series of tragedies--to name only one, Marie intervenes when Luzerne tries to hit her slave, receives the blow herself, and then gives birth to a premature baby which dies--Marie considers entering a convent. Her priest suggests an alternative--war work.

The war makes Marie more tolerant because more experienced. It also provides her with excitement and a sense of purpose. She assists the surgeons at Manassas, where all the soldiers idolize her. While the war revitalizes Marie, it makes Luzerne jealous. In trying to hit one

of Marie's admirers, Luzerne again misses and hits Marie instead. At this point he really begins to disintegrate; he leaves without even waiting to see if he has killed her and tries to desert to the Federal army to escape the consequences of his actions. He is shot in the attempt and believed dead, and Marie thinks she is free.

At this point Marie's real lessons in losing begin. She is now victimized by the world, not just by Luzerne. Little Dixie, a young boy who ran away to join the army and who is like a son to Marie, is mortally wounded and dies in her arms. She remarries, and her new husband is killed. She has a baby and it dies. Her faithful slave Eda dies. Her house is burned; her money is worthless; she falls ill. Her relatives send her twenty dollars and insults. Her married landlord propositions her.

And, after Marie has endured three hundred-odd pages of loss and disillusionment, the author tells us that "then commenced her toils" (p. 338). She supports herself in New Orleans by sewing and embroidery, consumed now by ambition to be a writer. She eventually gains some fame, writing under a pseudonym. She refuses a proposal of marriage, putting her hope of happiness in ambition rather than in the love of man, and the wisdom of this decision is confirmed by the return of Luzerne, now "Joe Brown, gambler." He has heard of her success and threatens to blackmail her by revealing her now-bigamous second marriage. In despair, she immediately joins a convent but dies the first night, and Luzerne in a melodramatic coincidence is killed in "a low den of infamy" at the same moment (p. 356).

The moral of the story seems to be "never trust a man," a conclusion reinforced by Marie's friend Josie, who has wisely become a

num on the first suspicion of her fiancé's wickedness. Josie nurses the broken woman who has married her former lover, a dissolute man; the woman tells her story:

I married, contrary to the wishes of my parents, Paul Mar. He never loved me, and rendered my life wretched. At length, when he had squandered all our property, he was one night shot dead at a ball, for paying too much attention to a married lady. His propensity for flirting never left him, and was the cause of his death. I have become reduced to what you see me. (p. 355)

The only good thing about bad husbands seems to be that they are easy to outlive. Their habits--drinking, taking drugs, flirting, fornicating, and involvement in shady political dealings--tend to shorten their lifespans. Then the women are free while still young enough to remarry or to pursue a career. Marie is not one of the luckier heroines.

While "bad husband" plots criticize male domination and cast women as martyrs and eternal victims, two novels by Louisiana women stand out as openly feminist in a positive sense, casting women as unquestioned victors. In fact, they too teach the lesson that one cannot depend on men. They argue, however, that talented and self-possessed young women can support themselves by taking charge of their own destinies and that they do not need men for security or happiness. These two novels are Florence Converse's Diana Victrix (1897) and Maud Howe Elliott's Atalanta in the South: A Romance (1886).<sup>7</sup> Both, as indicated by their titles, refer to myth for their authority, the Atalanta and Diana stories, which are often conflated. The legend was a popular one in

<sup>7</sup> Diana Victrix (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin; Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1897); Atalanta in the South: A Romance, (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1886).

Victorian literature: Swinburne had published his Atalanta in Calydon in 1865, and "Atalanta's Race" is the first poem in William Morris's The Earthly Paradise, published in 1868-70. Both novels cast their heroines as self-sufficient goddesses; both violate the Victorian tenet which ensured, as Judith Lowder Newton puts it in Women, Power, and Subversion, that

No matter how much force the heroine is granted at the beginning of her story, ideology, as it governed life and as it governed literary form, required that she should marry, and marriage meant relinquishment of power as surely as it meant the purchase of wedding clothes.<sup>8</sup>

A few other Louisiana women novelists make coy references to the woman's rights movement; some vigorously denounce it, and even Margaret Stanhill of The Finished Web has been exposed to the concept: "Her most intimate friend . . . advocated woman's rights. Perhaps Margaret had inherited some of her ideas" (p. 7). Stempel never follows up the reference, and we have seen how little good such ideas did Margaret and her wrongly-exiled mother. But Diana Victrix and Atalanta in the South both portray women with strong identities, dedicated to important professions, who believe passionately in the rights of women. Interestingly, these characters are all Northerners; Converse in particular portrays Southern women as either charming, innocently self-indulgent, and pleasure-loving or as embittered and bored.

Maud Howe Elliott, author of Atalanta in the South, constructs a world in which women have occupations and, while interested in men, are

<sup>8</sup> Newton, p. 8.

not obsessed by them. The daughter of Julia Ward Howe, Elliott was a Northerner, but she and her mother lived in New Orleans for a considerable time and were feverishly active in the cultural life of the city. For one thing, Howe rejuvenated a prestigious literary club formed by John Rose Ficklen at Tulane. This group included the poet "Pearl Rivers," the young Elizabeth Bisland Wetmore, and Henry B. Orr.<sup>9</sup> Grace King reports of the elder Howe that

She was too tactful to hint at the obnoxious designation of the "New South," and too intelligent not to ally herself with the "Old South" to which, in fact, she was allied by family tradition and social inclination.<sup>10</sup>

Her daughter both admires and criticizes the South in Atalanta. The novel is set in New Orleans during a yellow fever epidemic, and Elliott often refers to the heroine as "Margaret Ruysdale, sculptor." The label itself is significant, for Margaret considers her profession much more important than her love life. In fact, for Margaret, "There was none of that strife between love and work which vexes so many a woman's life, making the work seem at times a sin, and the love too great a sacrifice" (p. 34).

Like the victimized Marie Luzerne, Margaret perceives her career as an artist as far more reliable than romance. She has learned to depend on herself for identity, material support, and happiness:

<sup>9</sup> King, p. 57.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 54.



"Mr. Toil" is the only spouse who is never unfaithful; and when friend, sweetheart, husband, break troth with a woman, let her open her arms and fold the grim old fellow to her deserted breast. If she be true to him, he will not forsake her in her darkest hour. The more homage she laid at the feet of the mortal lover, the colder he grew, perchance; but with "Mr. Toil" every sacrifice is richly rewarded, the closer the embrace in which she folds him, the stronger the support he returns. (p. 69)

Margaret, unlike Marie, does not wait to be victimized before learning this important lesson. She inherits her skill from her father, a sculptor who was made a Captain at the outbreak of the Civil War: "His good right arm had been smitten off, his whole body was maimed and disabled, when, four years later, he came back to Woodbridge at the head of his broken regiment" (p. 32). Because he can never sculpt again, he prays for a son to carry on the talent, but he has a daughter instead, a daughter whose devotion to her craft is her primary characteristic.

Daughters, according to Atalanta, are really far more likely than sons to achieve great things. Elliott raises a question: "Is the phrase [the weaker sex] a satire, and today is the balance of power in the hands of men, or women?" (p. 29). The answer is apparent soon enough. The men in the novel are beaten and broken, dependent on the strength of women. They have ironic handicaps: the sculptor loses an arm; a doctor is unable to practise because he is repelled by sickness. In fact, says Elliott, "it seems today that chivalry has fled from the world, save when it lingers in some woman's breast" (p. 109). Only the strong can afford chivalry. Margaret has several suitors, all of whom fail to fit the stereotype of male aggression. Her father criticizes one for being "not quite manly" and another for being a "child" whom Margaret treats as a "plaything." She defends them: "Oh, papa, I think it is the most

manly thing in the world to be gentle to women" (pp. 87-88). In other words, Margaret is eager to transcend sex-role stereotypes.

Sarah Harden, a married woman, delivers a more blunt assessment of male capabilities:

I think that man is a degree below woman in evolution, that he is an inferior animal, that mentally as well as physically he is a less complex and less wonderful being than his mate. . . . I believe [men] to have been created to do all the disagreeable work in the world for us women--to keep the streets clean, govern the city, hang the murderers, make the laws, pay the butcher, and fight the battles. (p. 91)

Yet she perceptively admits that more often than not she shuns her own sex and prefers the company of men.

Atalanta depends heavily on allusions to myth to give it depth and meaning. Unfortunately, the myths are so mixed up that their point is unclear. Margaret perceives herself as Atalanta and Diana, uninterested in her suitors until distracted by a golden apple and tricked into marrying the wrong man. She models a bas-relief of the race, portraying herself as Atalanta and using the figure of Robert Feauardent as the successful suitor, Milanion. (Margaret does marry Feauardent, a decision Elliott regards as a grave mistake.) The book is prefaced with a long quotation from Swinburne's Atalanta in Calydon.

So far so good. But Elliott is not satisfied with pagan myth alone; she interjects a heavy Biblical element in Philip Rondlet, the rejected suitor, a selfless (and bodiless) young man who is repeatedly equated with Christ. When he dies--of a broken heart--he is the very image of the crucified Jesus, complete with stigmata. A dying madame

who has allowed her bordello to be converted into a fever hospital is portrayed as the Magdalen.

Obviously, Elliott does not use myth coherently or poetically. Her plot is vague and confusing, involving a distracting subplot which brings in mistaken identity, mixed blood, and duelling. But the center of Atalanta is its portrayal of an attractive young Southern woman to whom a career and self-reliance are more important than marriage.

Converse's Diana Victrix provides an even clearer portrait of liberation from male expectations, focusing on two Northern women who come South. Both are about twenty-eight, intellectual, and happily unmarried. Sylvia Bennett is very rich and has come South for her health, while Enid Spenser, who is a published author and who lectures on Socialism, has come along to care for her. The two board with the aristocratic Dumaraises, quickly becoming entangled with the family. Sylvia is attracted to Jocelyn, a weak and dissipated self-destructive con-man who soon dies as a result of his habits; he is last heard of living with a "skirt dancer" in New York. Jacques and Enid fall in love, but he is restrained by a prior commitment to his adopted sister Jeanne, who is sweet but dull. Everyone loves her, but she is conveniently eliminated early in the competition when she backs into a bonfire and incinerates herself. She is not unduly mourned, and the way to a conventional ending, maybe even a double wedding, seems clear. However, Enid refuses Jacques' offer of marriage in order to devote herself to Sylvia and to her own work. Sylvia, at the end of the book, has just heard from a publisher that her novel has been accepted. It is about a man like Jocelyn, an artist who is defeated by himself, and she dedicates it to Enid.

Diana Victrix is about sisterhood and solidarity. It argues that women can achieve as much as men, that for some women work is legitimately more important than marriage, and that it is acceptable, even charming, to be thirty, intellectual, and an unmarried woman. Enid is an activist who leads women workers to strike, who advocates education for all women, who lectures on Hugo, on modern socialist Utopias, on slum clearance, and on labor unions. She bluntly declares, "I have been sorry for married women oftener than for old maids" (p. 143). More important, she is actually able to influence men to accept her ideas. Jacques at first disapproves of her outspokenness, but he eventually acknowledges that he would not "want a marriage like David Copperfield's to Dora" (p. 198). He also puts into words what so many novelists were trying to suggest in subtler ways: "I believe it is quite true that we Southern men, for all our surface chivalry, do not always give our women a fair chance" (p. 183). The goddess is indeed victorious in Diana Victrix. The enemy is ignored, and so has no power. Male approval is regarded as irrelevant. The suggestion that women can be victors rather than victims, that they can win unqualified triumphs, appears in rather few novels by Louisiana women, but it does appear. The way to avoid a bad husband is, according to Converse and Elliott, to avoid matrimony. In fact, of course, these plots are somewhat unrealistic; given the extent of male power, simply ignoring men does not solve the problem of finding one's niche in the world. And to deny that an equitable relationship between husband and wife is possible surely also denies love and humanity. Diana Victrix in particular seems to depict a female community of almost mythic symbolism, where everyday conflicts do not arise and all is utopian sisterhood. In this sense,

both victim and victor novels are equally unrealistic: they vividly delineate the conflict between the sexes but suggest no workable solutions.

## Chapter Five

### Unwilling Sisterhood

Nineteenth-century Southern white women, as we have seen, were a subordinate group, expected to act not in their own best interests but in the best interests of others. If they did not, they were ostracized as unwomanly, even as unnatural or inhuman. As a group they were like the blacks, both slave and free, who were ruled by a similar code of behavior. Although blacks were even more dependent than white women on male white good will, for both groups passivity was a preeminent virtue. Passivity meant security, but security bought at the price of self-respect often seemed dear. Although innumerable Louisiana women writers referred to their heroines bitterly as "slaves" to husbands and families, few Southern women admitted any sympathy for the women's movement or the anti-slavery movement, or with the Grinké sisters, famous nineteenth-century suffragettes who stressed that black women are "our sisters" and that "women must cast off their own culturally imposed prohibitions and inhibitions."<sup>1</sup> But that Louisiana women recognized parallels between the social repression of women and blacks is apparent in the words and deeds of heroines like Mrs. J. H. Walworth's Olga, of Without Blemish; when asked what she intends to do about the negro problem, she bursts out passionately:

<sup>1</sup> Willie Lee Rose, "Reforming Women," The New York Review of Books XXIX (Oct. 7, 1982), 46.

What am I going to do about it? . . . What indeed can a poor feeble, powerless girl do? Rather ask what the men of the country are going to do about it? Why are they leaving the task of educating the negroes to people almost as ignorant as themselves . . . ? (p. 318)

Olga perceives a vicious cycle; both women and blacks are "feeble and powerless" because they have been denied education, and, even while apparently encouraging them to pursue learning, society has assured that neither group will progress far. Many novels by Louisiana women argue for educating blacks, and heroines variously teach in, administer, and endow black schools. Some are attempting to exorcise guilt; all have noble motives. Most are portrayed as operating in the same devotion-to-duty vein as Sarah Dorsey, author of Panola, who "from earliest youth . . . [has] devoted every faculty she possesse[d] to [the education of blacks]. . . . She has a class of from fifty to sixty scholars of negroes. She teaches them to read and write, and religion."<sup>2</sup>

But if Louisiana women authors easily recognized similarities between the social tactics used to subordinate white women and slaves, they found the logical consequence of the parallel--complete sympathy, and even an identity with the blacks--intensely uncomfortable. Such a connection implied, for most, recognition of an earthy side of themselves that they had been taught from youth to repress. An intelligent woman, especially after the war when legal distinctions between white and black were forcibly rescinded, could hardly escape noticing that the condition of her black sisters was similar to her

<sup>2</sup> Tardy, p. 207.

own. But her feelings might be compared to Gulliver's when he confronts the Yahoos: though these creatures look like me, they are bestial.

Thus although Louisiana women novelists constantly approach the issue of the metaphorical kinship between women and blacks, most of their direct attempts to explore such a connection are strangely abortive. Perhaps they could not comfortably admit to the public that they identified with blacks; perhaps they could not acknowledge such an identity even to themselves. Whatever the reason, authors draw back from an overt declaration that blacks and white women face similar forms of social oppression. Louisiana women writers did find a way to treat successfully the connection between being black and being female, but only through the diluted medium of the heroine of mixed blood, discussed in Chapter VI. Their portrayals of pure black characters are ambivalent and often negative.

In general, Louisiana women novelists treat blacks in stereotypical terms. In stories like Jeanette Downs Coltharp's Burrill Coleman, Colored, blacks are lazy, improvident, "ill-odored," faithless to lovers; they swear and gamble, and they are stupid and pretentious. They are, in other words, images of Jim Crow. Gaines quotes "a recent writer, C. S. Johnson," who describes the popular conception of the black man: "He is lazy, shiftless, and happy-go-lucky, loves watermelon, carries a razor, emits a peculiar odor, shoots craps, grins instead of smiles--is noisily religious, loves red, dresses flashily, loves gin,



and can sing." These traits were part of an enormously popular comic tradition, the minstrel show, which had begun as early as 1832.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to note that the pure Jim Crow, however obnoxious to genteel sensibilities, was incapable of deliberately harming white people. Such an assumption was comforting to whites, both before the war amid occasional rumors of slave uprisings and especially during reconstruction, when real violence was omnipresent. Ralph Ellison describes the sleight-of-mind which enabled whites to ignore their misgivings:

Either they deny the Negro's humanity and feel no cause to measure his actions against civilized norms; or they protect themselves from their guilt in the Negro's condition and from their fear that their cooks might poison them, or that their nursemaids might strangle their infant charges, or that their field hands might do them violence, by attributing to them a superhuman capacity for love, kindness and forgiveness. Nor does this in any way contradict their stereotyped conviction that all Negroes (meaning those with whom they have no contact) are given to the most animal behavior.<sup>4</sup>

As Ellison suggests, the pleasantest way to approach the problem was to sentimentalize blacks, just as it was more popular to sentimentalize the angelic woman rather than to dwell on the fallen one. The obvious contradictions apparent in real life served only to make the myth more attractive.

In Burrill Coleman, Colored, Coltharp focuses on the ambivalent relationship between whites and blacks. Near the end of her violent Reconstruction novel, she tells about the white children's "greatest

<sup>3</sup> Gaines, p. 17 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Shadow and Act (New York: Random House, 1953), p. 92.

pet." Compared to "a setter-dog, a maltese cat, the peafowls, and a white pigeon" is a two-year-old black child who is "smuggled" into the white folk's house, where they "played with him and fed him on cake and candy."<sup>5</sup> Coltharp has earlier explained that "Every clean baby darkey and every baby pig has a charm all its own. Both look so thoroughly animal and lift such questioning flat-nosed little faces, that one involuntarily wishes they might always be kept in their pristine state of innocence" (p. 127). Coltharp insists that whites loved their slaves; in many ways Burrill Coleman is a didactic defense of the defunct institution of slavery. But she also hints that this sort of love either stifles or demeans its object. For the white characters in her novel, so long as the black is mindless and innocent and will-less, he is a fine toy. Let him develop a mind, a will, a self, and he is at best annoying, at worst dangerous.

Gaines explains that from the 1880s to the 1920s, the prevailing fictional representation of race relations featured benign whites and happy, innocent, submissive blacks. He calls this era "the period of glorification."<sup>6</sup> Leslie Fiedler refers to the novels of this era as "anti-Tom" novels, meaning that they were written as direct rebuttals to Stowe's influential novel.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, several novels by Louisiana women explicitly set out to refute Stowe, and one, Uncle Tom of the Old South, even borrows part of her title. Despite the enduring popularity of Uncle Tom's Cabin, after the war abolitionism, Gaines observes, was

<sup>5</sup> Burrill Coleman, Colored: A Tale of the Cotton Fields. (Franklin, Ohio: Editor Publishing, 1896), pp. 174-75.

<sup>6</sup> Gaines, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Fiedler, pp. 10 ff.

"more than routed, it was tortured, scalped, 'mopped up.'" He goes on to say that "A popular literary device, repeated again and again, was to hand down the legend of splendor and joy through the mouths of the slaves themselves, 'those upon whose labor the system was founded and for whose sake it was destroyed.'"<sup>8</sup>

The popularity of the device is evident in the work of Louisiana women. Mary Frances Seibert's Zulma,<sup>9</sup> Mrs. M. F. Surghnor's Uncle Tom of the Old South, and Mrs. J. H. Walworth's Uncle Scipio are all named for the loyal ex-slaves whose stories they purport to tell. In Uncle Tom Surghnor even announces that she will allow this loyal man to give his own account of events. But a strange thing happens on the way to the end of the story. The title characters, far from narrating the tale, all but disappear. The authors seem to have abandoned the device as unworkable or unsatisfying for an extended narrative, but they have allowed the introductory material and titles to stand, perhaps because publishers and readers expected such tales. After several pages of painfully literal dialect, Surghnor in Uncle Tom mercifully shifts to the stance of an educated white Southerner; Walworth in Uncle Scipio and Seibert in Zulma never seriously attempt to present a black consciousness except in a few brief passages.

One reason for the abandonment of black narration may have been the difficulties of intelligibly reproducing black speech. Most authors use dialect; it enhanced a book's commercial value as "local color" and provided comic relief. In addition, most authors must have felt that a

<sup>8</sup> Gaines, pp. 62-63.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Frances Seibert, "Zulma": A Story of the Old South (Natchez, Miss.: Natchez Printing and Stationery Company, 1897).

realistic portrait of blacks was incomplete without the effort to capture their distinctive speech patterns. Unfortunately, few popular authors had grasped Mark Twain's minimalist approach, which held that suggestion is preferable to literal transcription. Thus dialect passages are too often almost indecipherable and, to modern readers, seem to be a sort of distasteful ethnic joke.

Although most writers steer clear of attempting to enter the consciousness of black characters, many approach the idea, name the book for a black protagonist, and then drift away from the issue, focusing on white lives and loves. Zulma illustrates such an approach. Though the slave girl Zulma performs a series of heroic rescues for her white family, the story is about her young mistress Lucille; Zulma never appears except when the white family is in peril. Her finest hour comes when she refuses a band of marauding Yankees entrance to her mistress's sickroom. They shoot her and she dies a horrible--though religious--death. But Seibert gives us no description of the sources of such sacrificial love, the motivation for such an action. In his 1897 introduction to Zulma, Irwin Huntington proudly emphasizes the "anti-Tom" intent of the novel:

And while the voice of "Topsy" is lifted up on the land proclaiming on the "seamy" side of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," it is not unfit even at this later date, that a "Zulma" be heard in turn and allowed to tell us in her homely way of the kindly, almost paternal relations that existed between master and slaves on the old Grosse Tête plantations" (p. 7)

Such claims probably helped to sell Zulma in 1897, but they were false. In fact, the "kindly, almost paternal relations" get short shrift, while Zulma's heroic deeds are taken for granted. Both are

merely a welcome convenience which allows the white characters to carry on their more glamorous lives undisturbed. Seibert also indicates that Zulmas are rare; most blacks in the novel follow the Union army like "dazzled moths." They "settled around the glare of its camp fires, perishing by the score, and undergoing untold sufferings brought on by famine and exposure" (p. 201).

Seibert's argument, and that of most anti-Tom novels, is that although slavery had drawbacks, its paternalistic nature was far preferable to the cold freedom offered by Yankees. The defense, although offered sincerely, rings somewhat hollow. For example, when Surghnor's devoted Uncle Tom pleads with rebellious ex-slaves to spare the lives of his white family, he claims that his master is a good man because "he give Fofe July bobbycue an' Christmas time jollerfercation, an' let us 'vite you all,--an' you come an' eat an' hab er good time, and he lub ter see yer" (p. 93). Even taken out of context, Tom's justification is weak, and it seems particularly lame when measured against his phenomenal efforts in behalf of his dispossessed master, Philip Gordon, an aristocratic young man who returns from the war to confront a ruined plantation and a senile father. Uncle Tom, an elderly ex-slave, has lived for the return of his young master, making money by gathering Spanish moss. Philip has been accompanied to war by Tom's son Mose, who is no less altruistic: Mose has worked as a cook while nursing the wounded Philip back to sanity and health.

Mose and Philip maintain an idyllic and childlike relationship; their return to the reality of the desolate plantation is nightmarish. Tom gives Philip and Mose a harrowing account of the war years:

Then he poured into their ears such a tale of woe as made Philip wonder how he could live and keep his senses--that caused him to begin to doubt the goodness of Him whom he had been taught to address as his "Father in Heaven"--a tale of a sick mother, left in her weakness, to burn in her bed--of an old and infirm grandfather, tortured till his agonized screams sounded through the house, and then left, tied to a bed-post, to fall a prey to the devouring flames; of brutal beasts who outraged his lovely sister until, with the strength of coming madness, she broke from their restraining grasp, a raving maniac, and threw herself into the swollen waters of the river; how Tom himself, utterly unable to save his old or his young mistress, had sought an entrance left unguarded by the fiends and had, at risk of his own life, cut the cords which bound the poor old grandfather, and carried him in his arms, a senseless burden, until almost at the bottom of the stairs, he was completely overcome by the heat and could carry him no longer, but was forced to yield him to the flames; how, in very wantonness of destruction they had shot down every chicken, pig, cow, sheep--everything; how the best ladies of the country, out of full storehouses, barns, and farmyards, had nothing left to save themselves and families from starvation but the corn which the horses had left, trampled in the dirt, and which they picked up and boiled into hominy. (pp. 28-29)

Bad as things are, all is not lost, for Uncle Tom has spent the war planning ways to re-establish his white folks. When he recovers from the shock of war-time atrocities, Philip decides to be a doctor, and Tom happily hands over his entire life savings. Philip is reluctant to take Tom's money, but Tom explains that he expects a return on it. Tom craves paternalism: he wants only to be taken care of in his old age and to be buried when he dies. That he could accomplish the same end more directly never occurs to him.

Philip becomes a success, and Tom feels that the ghost of his dead mistress will be satisfied with his work. But his task is not ended. Philip secretly marries Camilla, a bright but self-effacing young woman, and they spend three blissful months in the city. When they return to the small town which is their home, Philip goes over to the Republicans in an attempt to remain financially solvent; he is immediately abducted and deported by The Hidden Hand, a secret pro-Southern society.

Tom is confronted with yet another crisis: the marriage was conducted secretly, Philip has the license, and Camilla cannot remember who performed the ceremony or where it took place. She is pregnant, and obviously on the verge of ruin. Her grandmother and Tom conspire to move her into Philip's now-empty home while spreading the rumor that she has gone to Europe. Although Tom knows where Philip is, he refuses to tell, and transfers his boundless affection to Camilla, who believes herself to be an abandoned wife:

Black and ignorant as he was, the depth of tender sympathy that he exhibited for her was exquisitely touching. He would fish and bring her the nice strings of trout or perch that he knew she enjoyed. He would hunt and bring her the partridges that might tempt her appetite, rejoicing greatly when he found a nest of partridge eggs, those delicacies that it had been his delight, a quarter of a century before, to carry in his pockets to surprise and delight Miss Della's children. He would bring her wild flowers and ferns and mosses;--at one time he bought a young squirrel, in a new cage, for a present. (p. 140)

Tom's services extend beyond pastoral gift giving. When Camilla gives birth to a girl, Tom tells her it was born dead and gives it to the caretaker, who has just lost a child. He feels that he has saved her from the disgrace of bringing up an apparently illegitimate child while assuring that the child will be nearby. Years later a fever epidemic strikes, Philip returns disguised as a doctor, and only Tom recognizes him. Philip refuses to make himself known to Camilla while he is in disgrace, but he frequently stages "visions" of himself to tell her useful things, such as where to find the family jewels. While Philip plays these complicated games designed to protect his fragile sense of honor, Tom continues to avert financial disaster.

Philip, who has taken the name Dr. Peyton, is now famous and idolized. But he plays Manfred, wallowing in his guilt and exile, while Camilla suffers silently. Neither she nor Tom ever questions the duty of sacrificing for him; he is a royal being. Finally he saves a child from diphtheria. It happens to belong to one of the Brothers of the Hidden Hand; in gratitude the group declares his sin "expiated." Philip's identity is revealed; mother, father, and child are reunited; faithful wife and faithful slave are rewarded.

Thus a substantial part of the story conforms to the anti-Tom type. But there are undercurrents in Uncle Tom which suggest that Surghnor respects other qualities in addition to passivity. She rewards Tom and his wife Betsey materially for their loyalty, with clothes, furniture, carpets, china, silver, a buggy stable, horse, harness, and quilts. But the novel ends not with their triumph but with pages upon pages devoted to the outpourings of an outspoken, intellectual, original thinker, Mrs. Moreland, who is anything but passive. A striking contrast to Camilla's imitation of Patient Griselda, she rages intelligently about the state of education, about reincarnation, politics, formal religion, women's limited roles. She is strong and certainly not protected or innocent. Her very presence in the novel is contradictory; her prevalence is a strong antidote to the values inherent in the central plot. Surghnor edges toward the conclusion that women should be victors instead of victims, but she is unable or unwilling to embrace the idea. She is unable even to conceive of the logical extension of her unspoken argument: blacks, too, deserve autonomy. Instead she lauds their self-sacrifice. Uncle Tom can only be happy if his master is happy; he has no independent personality.



Uncle Scipio, in Walworth's novel of the same name, is even less a character than Uncle Tom. Walworth, too, says that Uncle Scipio will tell his own story, but he hardly speaks. He, too, courageously protects his white folks, and his most memorable line is "The water tastes sweeter to us out'n the gode our white folks is touched" (p. 309). Walworth does appear to recognize the pragmatic roots of such loyalty, however. She has an elderly black man declare that "w'en de nigger gits t'knowin' dat he is got to mek a contrac' uv mutualibility wid his wite folks, he's on de road t'wisdom, en will fotch up healthy en wealthy en wise, and not 'fore" (p. 339). Many writers recognize that slaves often mourned their masters out of fear that the future would bring worse, but sometimes they describe unquestioning loyalty of ludicrous proportions. In Davis's The Wirecutters, for example, an old slave says of his dead master, "He was de bes' master! Lord, Marse Roy has laid de lash on my back mo' times dan I kin count" (p. 303). The master's son accepts this doubtful tribute without question.

Though Gaines stresses that "the favorite formula calls for a desperate poverty on the part of the whites, under which circumstances the black acts as a genius [sic] of the lamp,"<sup>10</sup> some novelists choose to show blacks not as genies or as useful pets but as untrustworthy wild animals. Almost every Reconstruction novel features earnest but bungled plots against white lives and property, set against the ministrations of the more intelligent loyal servants. Burrill Coleman, Colored takes its title from the name of the leader of an uprising, a plot to take over the parish and exterminate all the whites. Again the title is

<sup>10</sup> Gaines, p. 218.

misleading, for the novel primarily follows the fortunes of its white characters. Only near the end does Coleman appear significant, when he is arrested. He has managed to escape all suspicion by appearing totally obsequious and respectable. Coltharp indicates that he is an exception: most blacks are far too stupid, superstitious, and timid to emulate him. But in her insistence is a note of anxiety. The heroine of the novel is visited by a black man selling a sewing-machine attachment, Junius Bishop, who asks for "a few moments of your valuable time" (p. 67). Nellie's reaction is automatic: she "looked keenly at the darky to see if his allusion to her valuable time was meant as sarcasm, but although he was evidently filled with the consciousness of his own importance, his demeanor was respectful and she allowed him the benefit of the doubt" (p. 67). The scene is typical of others in these novels: white people want desperately to believe that their ex-slaves are loyal and simple, but they must fight off the growing awareness that this estimate may be dangerously false. It also indicates that Nellie is sensitive about her relative idleness; how could anyone, even a black man, seriously refer to a woman's "valuable time?" She is alert for the nuances of language used by the weak to flatter the powerful.

Nellie has learned the same lessons as Junius Bishop about the uses of deception. Leon Litwack explains that

The education acquired by each slave was remarkably uniform, consisting largely of lessons in survival and accommodation--the uses of humility, the virtues of ignorance, the arts of evasion, the subtleties of verbal intonation, the techniques by which feelings and emotions were masked, and the occasions that demanded the flattering of white egos and the placating of white fears.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Been in the Storm So Long: The Emergence of Black Freedom in the South (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), p. xi.

Change the word "slave" to "woman" and "white" to "male" and the passage remains accurate if exaggerated. Nellie can read Junius Bishop's meaning because she identifies, however unwillingly, with his experience. Josephine Nicholls's heroine Mary, in Bayou Triste, is similarly able to read the body-language of a black woman:

She was a tall, ungainly woman, as black as the ace of spades, slow of speech and usually accounted slow of intellect, with a cheerful smile and a confiding manner that was exceedingly gratifying to your self-esteem. She gave you the impression of standing mentally in awe of you, and by her attitude disposed you favorably towards her at once." (p. 16)

Mary recognizes the trick because, as a woman, she has used similar ploys to gain favor with men. In one scene she inspires a man to propose to her simply by listening raptly instead of talking. Clearly she believes that the woman's show of stupidity is really a clever tactic for getting along with whites, comparable to her own flattering self-effacement in male company.

Just as anti-heroines, though overtly criticized, are often allowed self-justification, black characters are sometimes given eloquent speeches in which they point out the flawed emotional logic by which whites operate. In Bryan's Wild Work, for example, Zoe questions Tom, a black man, about a rumored black uprising:

"What is it, Tom, that you negroes intend to do?"  
 "I ain't said we niggers is goin' to do nothin'."  
 "I am glad you are not. I thought you had more sense than to

attempt any riot," she answered, pretending indifference and moving away. Her assumed carelessness had the desired effect. It made him more eager to impart the news.

"You don't understan'. Niggers ain't goin' to do nothin'," he said, "but colored men is tired of bein' trampled on, and is goin' to make a defense if no more. No sense you say, hey? You think 'twould be sense, though, to set down here and let de white folks shoot and hang us like dey done Mose Clark las' week, and Saul and Peter in Cohatchie dis morning, and de Lord knows how many more by dis time. Word come to us a month ago dat dis rumpus was gwine to be. Strange man 'splained it to us. God showed it to him in his dreams, and told him to tell us we must stand stiff or we'd be buzzard meat afore we know it. But we jes' went on and didn't pay much 'tention till dey begun to fire in our windows an' down our chimleys, an' Uncle Mose Clark was shot in his tracks, an' den we begin to git worked up, and had meetins to talk over what we mus' do, and of a sudden we hear dis news from Cohatchie; soldiers pourin' in, hangin' and 'restin' dere, and coming down here to kill out our race. We made up a comp'ny las' night." (pp. 267-68)

Against this powerful argument, Zoe's next speech seems weak and hypocritical: "You would let them come here to burn and kill us after all the kindness we have shown you, Tom Ludd? You said I saved your child's life when it had spasms two weeks ago; is this the return you make?" (p. 268). Though it emphasizes the interdependence of the two races, Zoe's reply is almost as ineffectual as Uncle Tom's invocation of antebellum "Fofe July bobbycue an' Christmas time jollerfercation" as cause for gratitude.

Zoe has a similar confrontation with Levi, the half Indian half black leader of the uprising. Levi harshly reiterates the litany of white wrongs, forcing the reader, if not Zoe, to reexamine their truth: "'Twan'n't cruel to hang Saul and Peter this morning without fair trial? 'Tain't cruel to kill the Radicals or drive 'em out of the country because they're friends to us? Why don't you look at that?" Zoe replies that anyone who would murder sick men and helpless women is "a fiend and a coward," and Levi furiously exposes her patronizing

attitude: "You hate us, you white-skinned women. . . . You speak to us kindly as you do to dogs, but you scringe if we chance to come close to you. It would do me good to humble you; to see you kneel to me" (pp. 270-71). For blacks, caught up in a violent struggle for recognition as worthwhile human beings, the language of chivalry and genteel morality is an empty sham. They recognize that it never works for them, only against them. Only the very brave or the very desperate, however, would risk expressing such ideas to those in power; to do so is to be labelled dangerous and to court danger.

Blacks and women are aware of the differences between their public and private selves. Because society casts them into extreme roles as pets or wild animals, angels or devils, they must develop reliable public masks and keep any subversive opinions safely concealed. The majority in both groups live dual lives, presenting one face to society and allowing the other to show only in the presence of trustworthy members of the group. Parolet Chandos Trevor's dual life, discussed in Chapter III, was a result of the conflict between her own sensual, intellectual, active humanity and society's expectation that she be asexual, passive, and blank, but for Aunt Nancy, a character in Walworth's The New Man at Rossmere, the split occurs between black and white perceptions:

Aunt Nancy led a dual life and sustained a dual character . . . To the family at the "big house" and the sparse white population of the neighborhood she was Aunt Nancy Southmead, the best cook and most reliable house servant in the country. In the "quarters," and to the dense colored population of the lake bed, she was Mrs. Ab'm Potter, a lady of social importance, and a personage of marked dignity. The facts of her husband, Abram Potter, being head of the biggest "squad" and the best "crapper" on the place, as well as first engineer during ginning time, established her social supremacy beyond peradventure. (p. 163)

Aunt Nancy, although a competent person in her own right, is dependent for identity not only on her husband but on her white employers. She is aware that her security depends on her ability to switch roles gracefully and to conceal certain aspects of her personality.

The advisability of concealment for the powerless is summed up in a slave song which the heroine Noémie sings in The Price of Silence:

I met a possum in de road  
 He humble 'peared to be.  
 "I kin lay low and wait," he say,  
 "ontwel de yearth is mine." (p. 88)

Though Noémie sings this song because she feels it has personal significance for her, she learns it from an ex-slave, Uncle Mink, to whom forbearance and humble patience have become second nature. Uncle Mink, in turn, enjoys feeling superior to women of his own race; he crudely echoes white attitudes toward women as animals which are either wild or domestic. Mink has had four wives; he never lives alone: "Oh, I always takes 'em young. . . ." he says. "Dey bites and dey scratches mo', but dey tames mo' easier dan ole ones" (p. 27).

Especially in later works, those which were written from 1900 to 1919, writers often depict black marriages as an indirect comment upon the inequities of white marriages. The trend reflects a growing awareness that black women and white women are sisters, equally subject to the demands of males. The growth to awareness was painful, not only because of the inherited belief that blacks were inferior but because black and white women had long been unspoken sexual rivals. White women

were nominally in command; they legally had all the privileges of wealth and position. Yet their husbands were often involved, both sexually and emotionally, with black women who by virtue of their lower status were exempt from the demand that women be asexual. Thus the interests of black women and white women had traditionally been in conflict. Black women were not happy with their own exploitation, but, given the alternatives, many acquiesced and used the situation to advantage. Gradually, however, Louisiana women writers moved toward a recognition of kinship and found that they could learn about their own lives by studying those of black women.

While women often cast their black characters as naive, pretentious, dirty, crude, and irresponsible, it is startling how often black characters, like villainesses, seem to serve as alter-egos for the author. They act out what whites cannot, parallel the central drama played out by the whites, or comment ironically, like a Greek chorus, on the central action. Blacks lacked the luxury of sentimentality because they were caught in a struggle for survival, and black relationships often lacked the deceptive veneer of romance. Thus black characters could realistically be made to say and do things which would be unthinkable in a young heroine--or in a young authoress, who could demurely insist that she was simply holding a mirror up to nature. Black men in these stories are shown to behave the way they do toward their women because of the same general attitudes that motivate white men, but they are less careful to color their behavior with chivalry, sentimentality, and charming rhetoric.

Josephine Nicholls's Bayou Triste juxtaposes the love affairs of blacks and whites to unify the structure of the novel. Though as a

literary effort the book is only partly successful and the story often seems clumsy and disjointed, it does provide a strong suggestion that Southern authors consciously employed such techniques in order to describe their own lives. The story centers around the narrator Mary's thwarted love affair with a Yankee, and eventually culminates in her marriage. Told in the first person (extremely rare in these novels), Bayou Triste's real theme is Mary's initiation into adulthood. Most of her experiences are intimately connected to her relationships to blacks, especially with black women.

An early episode provides both a glimpse of typical situations presented in the novel and a key to their meaning for Nicholls. Mary is quite fond of a black girl named Charlotte Deals, who is small, ugly, and the butt of jokes among the blacks. But Charlotte is a good cook, and on the strength of this talent Lincoln Wilson asks her to marry him. Lincoln, a real catch, is the son of Mary's maid Priscilla, who claims that Charlotte "kunjered" Lincoln. When Mary discusses this problem with her brother, Fred, she also suggests the central perspective of the novel:

"Real cleverness," I said, "is comprehension of the situation."  
 "Or the individual," suggested he.  
 "Yes."  
 "From a woman's point of view, Mary."  
 "And that," said I, "is sure to be the right one." (p. 37)

Nicholls accordingly goes on to present a woman's developing vision of the world, with detailed descriptions of character, personal relationships, romances, and domestic chores. The black women who populate Mary's life dominate the narrative, discoursing on love,



marriage, economic conditions, and correct social behavior. Priscilla voices the unvarnished truth about her own situation:

"But, if you ain' never hed no leanin' ter marry, you done right ter stay single; an' I reckon when you counts hit all up you hez choozed de better part."

I laughed. "That is rather hard on Henry, Priscilla."

"Hinery's a good husban' ez husban's go, Miss Mary; but when a 'ooman marries she ain' free no longer, she 'bleeged ter insult anoder pusson 'bout every leetle thing she duz, and after awhile dat gits kiner wearin'.

I did not tell Priscilla so, but in a crude way she had expressed my own objections. (p. 71)

One assumes that in her later observations as well, Priscilla voices Mary's qualms. For example, Priscilla tells her

"Ise got money laid up, Miss Mary. I reckon hit's wuth while fur Hinery ter consort heself right wid me. My ma sez to me de night I was married, "Sylla," sez she, "don' you never let Hinery git hole of what you makes; he'll rispict you ef you hez money of yo' own." An' Miss Mary, child, I ain' never furgot dat advice; . . . 'Tain' no use talkin', Miss Mary; ef you wants peace youse bleeged ter take a stan' frum de fus'." (p. 72)

Though disguised as Priscilla's advice, this passage apparently represents Nicholls's feelings about economic equality. Charlotte, too, provides a raw glimpse into the power struggle between the sexes. When Mary asks her how she likes married life, she replies, "Wese been married six months, Miss Mary . . . an' he ain' never beat me yit" (p. 203). Mary is shocked, both by the blunt honesty of the response and by Charlotte's meagre concept of marital bliss. She asks Priscilla what furniture she has, and finds out that Priscilla's father gave her a bed and a bureau for a wedding gift but that she left them at her parents' house. Thinking this odd, Mary asks why.

"Dey's mine, you see, en ef Lincoln an' me ever falls out, I'll hev 'em all right at my pa's; but ef I fatches 'em over to us house Lincoln cud say dey wuz his'n an' tek 'em fur heself."

The confident anticipation of trouble and subsequent deep laid schemes in regard to the bed and bureau made me open my eyes.

"But, Charlotte," I protested, "you oughtn't to feel like that; when people are married they must trust each other."

Charlotte smiled.

"Dat's white folks' ways, Miss Mary, but niggers is duffrunt. You kawn't count on a nigger; youse bleegeed ter be ready fur him. I knows Ise slow an' ugly, an' Lincoln's one of dese hyar high-steppin' niggers what ain got no better sense den ter think deys ez good ez ennybody, so he might get tired of me. Den he'd 'gin ter treat me bad sose ter mek me quit him."

"I hope that will never happen," I said.

"Well, Miss Mary, I don' reckon hit will," she responded cheerfully. "I cooks an' I washes an' I darns fur him; I keeps him cumfurtubble, an' I ain' never sputing what he's got ter say (kase I kin hev my own ideas jes de same), an' I lows we'll git erlong ez well ez mos' folks." (pp. 205-07)

Charlotte sees marriage as a bargain, a trade-off; if she fulfils Lincoln's expectations--and they clearly involve services rendered--he will most likely fulfil hers, which are not unrealistic. But she is canny enough to keep an ace up her sleeve in case he reneges. Charlotte and Priscilla voice practical ideas about human relationships and the status of women that Mary finds repugnant but accurate. Blacks are closer to the edge, and black women risk everything if they do not look out for themselves and act as realists. Mary can afford a little more romance, although she herself is relatively practical.

The remarkable thing about the Bayou Triste is the extent of real interaction between whites and blacks; each race meddles shamelessly in the affairs (especially the romantic affairs) of the other. Mammy, for example, makes loud noises with the tongs to drive away one of Mary's suitors who she feels has stayed too long. When Mary's brother Fred has

difficulty with a girlfriend, Mammy pretends to have a seizure and persuades the lovers that her dying wish is to see them betrothed. At the same time, Mary sets up elaborate schemes to manipulate a negro couple into a marriage that she considers suitable, bribing the groom to accept a good, hardworking, honest, ugly wife by setting him up as a hostler.

All these intrigues are peripheral to the central romantic plot. Mary is courted by a Yankee, falls in love with him, and he suddenly and inexplicably leaves. An old black servant called Uncle Ephr'um, disapproving of the Yankee's political associations, has thwarted his confession of love to Mary by hinting that she is engaged to another man. Ephr'um then manipulates her into an engagement to Charlie, a boring man who appeals to Uncle Ephr'um because he is both solvent and Southern. Ephr'um, however, repents spectacularly when he sees how distressed Mary is, writing a confessional letter to the Yankee which results in his return and Mary's engagement.

Despite these obstacles and her own apprehensions, Mary's wedding day finally arrives, and though she genuinely loves the groom and is grateful for his love, she experiences "a sudden realization of loss" (p. 209). The novel ends on a note of pragmatic materialism tempered by humanity: "Money isn't everything," Mary says to a black woman. "No'm, hit ain' everthing, dat's so; but hit ain' nothing ter laff at neider" (p. 218). And Priscilla has the last word:

"Dem rich folkses ain' never gwine onsettles Miss Mary, kase she's got what's better'n money--she's got blood, an' she ain' never gwine back on hit. . . . Don' you let 'em skeer you, nemmine ef dey is rich, jes you hole up your hade an' 'member who you is, an' nothin' ain' gwine flustrate you den."

A sentiment so entirely in sympathy with my own views, that

in the after years I found it easy to comply with the parting advice of my voluble, audacious, yet always good-hearted follower. (pp. 226-27)

Mary recognizes her kinship to Priscilla and Charlotte and to the other black women in Bayou Triste who survive inequitable marriages with pragmatism and humor. Though Nicholls was more explicit about the relationship between black and white women than many Louisiana women writers, to some degree she still presents an unwilling sisterhood. Her title, which means "sad bayou," may refer to the reluctance women felt in facing the truth about themselves and their status. To argue that women deserved autonomy and respect was, by extension, to argue that blacks deserved the same consideration. Either assumption struck at the heart of the traditional social order. The parallel between the two oppressed groups became increasingly clear, but Louisiana women writers were reluctant to face it head on. Instead, they approached it peripherally, in the indirect juxtapositions we have seen and in a more powerful form, the story of the mixed-blood heroine.

## Chapter Six

### Double Jeopardy: Tainted Blood

A surprising number of novels by Louisiana women focus on what Francis Pendleton Gaines calls "the tragedy of tainted blood"; they fall into a long popular tradition of such tales, beginning in the 1830s and continuing to the present. According to the formula for these stories, a beautiful young woman, brought up in the midst of wealth and social prominence, is suddenly discovered to have black ancestry. Gaines describes such stories as exhibiting "a sensational theme of loveliness that beats frail wings of hope against the bars of convention and finds only an ending of despair."<sup>1</sup> Tainted blood was a major subject in abolitionist literature, for obvious reasons: the apparent "whiteness" of the heroine produced a strong emotional reaction to the injustices of slavery. Such works as Mayne Reid's popular novel The Quadroon and Dion Boucicault's drama The Octoroon tend to emphasize the brutality of the auction scene as a pure young woman is sold to unscrupulous slave traders and to describe the obsessive love of white men for the beautiful mulatto. But if the story of tainted blood was originally used as an abolitionist's tactic, it acquired even more significance in the work of white Southerners after the war, as William Bedford Clark

<sup>1</sup> Gaines, p. 159.

points out in his essay "The Serpent of Lust in the Southern Garden."<sup>2</sup> "The specific sin of miscegenation," Clark says, "becomes a convenient fictional symbol for expressing the South's broader guilt over the whole question of bondage and the racial wrongs arising from it."<sup>3</sup> Primarily interested in male treatments of the mixed blood motif, Clark deals chiefly with Faulkner, Twain, Harris, Warren, Jefferson, and Longfellow. He describes these writers' typical miscegenation story:

[It is] constructed around a mythical pattern of guilt and retribution. . . . a story in which miscegenation and the "unnatural" treatment of biracial offspring conveniently stand for the South's real sins: the prostitution of an entire race of black bodies for the gratification of the white man's lust for wealth and power and the resultant violation of those "family ties" traditionally associated with the Christian notion of the brotherhood of man.<sup>4</sup>

But if the story of mixed blood was regarded by male writers as involving guilt and retribution, women writers found their primary interest in such a story in the relation between mixed blood and the problem of self-definition. Suddenly deprived not only of her inherited social and economic status but of the whole phalanx of male protectors, husbands and fathers, who had defined her worth, the woman who discovers that she has mixed blood is, in the eyes of women writers, in double jeopardy. The usual routes to economic and social security are cut off. A mulatto woman cannot marry a white man whom she truly loves, for

<sup>2</sup> "The Serpent of Lust in the Southern Garden," Southern Review, 10 (Oct. 1974), 807.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 806.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 809.

she will bring him social misery, and, worse, perpetuate the mixed blood through her children. A married woman who discovers "too late" that she is tainted is faced with an even worse dilemma: her very existence causes her husband (who in novels by Louisiana women is usually rigidly opposed to miscegenation on "scientific" grounds) unbearable pain. That rejection of tainted wives was not merely fictional convention but social reality as well is confirmed by this case, reported by an English visitor to the United States in 1849:

A recent occurrence in Louisville places in a strong light the unnatural relation in which the two races now stand to each other. One of the citizens, a respectable young tradesman, became attached to a young seamstress, who had been working in his mother's house, and married her, in the full belief that she was free and a white woman. He had lived with her some time when it was discovered that she was a negress and a slave, who had never been legally emancipated so that the marriage was void; yet a separation was thought so much a matter of course that I heard the young man's generosity commended because he had purchased her freedom after the discovery, and given her the means of setting up as a dressmaker.<sup>5</sup>

In the history of the South miscegenation was a recurring and explosive legal and social issue. James Hugo Johnston points out that even though in the colonial period laws were passed against miscegenation, by the end of the period there were more than sixty thousand mulattoes in the English colonies.<sup>6</sup> Johnston observes:

<sup>5</sup> Sir Charles Lyell, A Second Visit to the United States of America (New York, 1849), vol. II, p. 215, quoted in James Hugo Johnston, Race Relations in Virginia and Miscegenation in the South, 1776-1860 (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1970), pp. 210-11.

<sup>6</sup> Johnston, p. 190.

The mulatto was in most cases, it seems certain, the descendant of the white man and the Negro woman. Sexual life in the slave period exhibited phenomena that would be characteristic of any community where subject women are controlled by men. . . . The Negro slave woman was an absolute dependent; dependent upon white men who dominated the little isolated world of the plantation. The black woman as other women subject or economically dependent upon controlling males made use of such powers as nature had given her for her personal aggrandizement.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, the black woman traded sex for comfort and a measure of security. The ironies of this situation are many, for it made black and white women into sexual rivals. Black women, who were most directly oppressed by the system, often appeared to white women not as fellow victims but as rivals for the affection of their husbands; many produced mulatto offspring who were potential contenders with white children for inheritance. The general rule was to deny mulattoes the right to inherit property, but the laws varied tremendously, as did the way they were interpreted. Lawmakers were sensitive to the problems involved in enforcing statutes which declared that a mere trace of Negro blood made a person a mulatto, and recognized that by those standards many people in high society would be counted Negroes.<sup>8</sup> Fathers, as Johnston repeatedly points out, were often strongly attached to their illegitimate children and gave them property and freedom. He emphasizes that Louisiana was a special case because of its complicated ethnic mixture and notes that after 1833 there were more cases involving the

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 193.



status of the Negro in Louisiana than in any other state.<sup>9</sup> The slave code was increasingly tightened to restrict the rights of mulattoes, but fathers continued to find loopholes by which they could bequeath property to mistresses and children. Despite the justice and humanity of providing for one's offspring, legal wives and heirs were hostile to such benevolence; after all, it diminished the estate. Although fathers were inclined to be generous and many people were uneasy about the implications of a code which designated anyone with a trace of mixed blood as black, in a number of cases cited by Johnson persons discovered to have black blood were subsequently sold as slaves or stripped of their property. A person with mixed blood obviously ran a constant risk of discovery, disinheritance, and social death, however great his social standing. In this scheme, the person's reputation, skills, and charms all counted for nothing if the secret taint were discovered.

There must in actual fact have been a good many mulatto males who were discovered and disinherited. But male mulattoes generally appear in novels only peripherally as evil ringleaders of black gangs. Mulattoes used as central characters in nineteenth-century popular fiction are most often female; the familiar plot involving disinheritance, humiliation, and revoked autonomy was more closely related to normal female experience than to male. Actual conditions may have penalized male and female mulattoes equally, but literary sympathies tended to focus on the abused woman. While male novelists emphasized forbidden passion and the erotic appeal of women who are legally and socially vulnerable, dwelling on auction scenes and physical

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 231.

cruelties, female novelists seem to have been far more interested in the psychological cruelties facing heroines with mixed blood, emphasizing the anxiety, rage, and helplessness a heroine feels when she discovers her previously unimagined vulnerability.

Mrs. M. E. Braddon's popular wartime novel The Octoroon, a British abolitionist tract, probably helped establish a pattern for later mixed-blood stories by women. While Cora, the heroine, never voices her own feelings, she suffers from the desertion of her former friends and is obsessed with the sad fate of her slave mother, who had committed suicide when Cora's father sold her. Braddon presents women as physical victims, but she recognizes the power of psychological traumas as well. While Louisiana women generally try to evade the abolitionist implications of the traditional mixed-blood plot, they identify strongly with its imperiled heroine. Abolitionists had found that such a plot allowed them to expose the injustice of a political system based on human bondage. Southern women discovered that the same plot allowed them to explore the injustice of the female condition.

In the most popular mixed-blood plot, heroines who look perfectly white, who have been brought up with all the advantages, discover in adolescence or early womanhood that they have slave ancestry. The discovery is horrifying not only because it threatens loss of property and status but because it threatens the pure and romantic self-image of the heroine. Often black ancestry begins to manifest itself through what Gaines calls "reversion to type": a heroine has exceptional musical talent or rhythm, develops superstitions, and is given to lying

and other stereotypical black traits.<sup>10</sup> The reversion is involuntary and uncontrollable, and it reveals a coarser, more animal side to the young woman's nature. A woman's anxiety about her own impurity is often compounded by anxiety about passing it on to children or otherwise disgracing the ones she loves.

Fascination with this physical yet invisible taint is probably a projection of authors' anxieties about less tangible "taints." Women, as we have seen, were expected to be passive, asexual, patient, and unselfish, an ideal to which most young women probably aspired. Yet human beings, male or female, do not naturally conform to this ideal; in adolescence and young womanhood, women typically recognize in themselves some degree of egotism, sexuality, intellectual curiosity, and temper--"taints" which they are taught to hide from the world. To reveal such imperfections might be to forfeit approval and the economic security of marriage. Such a situation caused feelings of rage and helplessness, but the cards were stacked against young women "tainted" with assertiveness. The experiences of the heroine of a mixed-blood novel metaphorically replicate the anxieties of her female creator.

Mixed-blood stories are also compelling because they dramatize the conflicting attitudes of a society in transition, pitting universal values against traditional taboos. They plunge characters into emotional situations which test the very foundations of their social consciousnesses. For the heroine with mixed blood and for the nineteenth-century woman artist, unqualified victory is impossible and real defeat, even annihilation, is probable. Ambiguities abound in

<sup>10</sup> Gaines, p. 198.

mixed-blood stories; a sense of irony and complexity pervades them more than stories built around any other popular plot or formula.

Sarah Anne Dorsey's Panola, while atypical in some ways, illustrates an acute awareness of Louisiana's exotic ethnic diversity and the ferocity of traditional racial prejudices.<sup>11</sup> A brief account of the major characters in the novel suggests the complicated relationships portrayed. Panola begins when Natika (half Greek) and Victor come to stay with their grandfather, Dr. Canonge (a Creole) and their cousin Mark (part Cherokee). Mark's stepmother is part black. Their neighbor is Panola, a beautiful half-Cherokee albino. She lives with her Cherokee mother, who is paralyzed. Mark is also paralyzed. His uncle has left a will which gives him a huge estate, but only if he learns to walk again and then marries. This confusing mixture eventually resolves itself into a plot that features racial hatred and betrayal. Panola marries Victor, but she soon learns that she has been used as a pawn to make Natika jealous. The Civil War reunites Victor and Natika, and Panola, left alone, seeks a divorce. Mark's stepmother, motivated by greed and racial hatred, is revealed as the poisoner of both Mark and Panola's mother. (The poison, derived from a special variety of pea, does not kill but paralyzes.) Panola, meanwhile, discovers fame and fortune as a concert violinist, having profitably reverted to type.

In spite of these bizarre combinations, the novel does not dwell on the moral complications of racial mixture. Dorsey rewards the good and punishes the wicked. Mark miraculously learns to walk again, inspired by the sight of Panola, and they marry and inherit a fortune. Victor

<sup>11</sup> Panola: A Tale of Louisiana (Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson and Brothers, [c. 1877]).

dies a pitiful death, deserted by Natika and nursed by his ex-wife. Panola, who is half Indian, marries two white men in succession; there is a suggestion that many of her trials, such as Victor's heartless use of her to make another woman jealous, are a result of her lower status, but there is no real taboo which prevents her from marrying white men. The strongest prejudice in Panola exists between Indians and blacks. A classic example occurs when Panola's Cherokee mother has too much milk and is advised to suckle another infant. The only baby available is black, so she suckles a fawn, an animal, instead. Dorsey insists in a note that "This incident . . . is taken from life" (p. 154). Her point seems to be that white prejudice is negligible in comparison with that of Indians; measured against their standard, white people aren't so bad.

Panola, while significant because of the intricacy of the ethnic and racial mixtures it describes, does not conform to the prevailing pattern of Louisiana mixed-blood stories by women. A more typical plot occurs in Towards the Gulf, published anonymously in 1887 but attributed to Alice Mississippi Morris Buckner. Gaines mentions it as having been popular; it is relatively well written and has a unified plot and developed characters. Set in the reconstruction South, it presents a broken and reviving world and focuses obsessively on miscegenation. The novel confronts the problem of what to do with the old values. Are they relevant to the new order? Are they crucial to the survival of civilization? Or are they the relics of an evil that is best swept away?

These questions become intensely important to the Morants, a New Orleans family who were formerly wealthy and socially prominent but who have been reduced by the war to genteel poverty. The hopes of old

Madame Morant and her daughter Isabel rest entirely upon the fortunes of John Morant, the son and brother. He enters the cotton business, though in former years he would have pursued a career in science or literature. The women hope for a "brilliant marriage" for John, and he falls in love with Alabama (Bamma) Muir, the adopted daughter of an English aristocrat. They marry. The plot turns on the drawn-out discovery that Bamma has black blood and on her husband's increasing rigidity about racial mixture. Suspecting that she is tainted, he becomes obsessed with race and interbreeding, taking, despite his love for his wife, the position which allows no tolerance. He and his friends serve as mouthpieces for opposing views, lecturing each other almost endlessly on the subject. Measured in terms of rhetoric, John's purist position appears to dominate the novel. The speeches which support his position are articulate and copious.

The novel is permeated by two symbolic image patterns which are insistently evoked in relation to the theme of mixed blood. One is the appearance of a white blackbird, caged in a taxidermist's shop. The owner and his wife have tried to give the bird a mate, but normal birds reject him. This sad tale haunts Morant; he asks to have the bird when it dies, stuffed, as an ornament. The very day Bamma picks it up, the old servant Celine reveals to her that her blood is tainted. Her husband has discovered her ancestry, and his involuntary repulsion has made him cold toward her.

John has been working tirelessly to restore the prosperity of the old family plantation, but a terrible flood destroys his work. This flood becomes the other significant image, sweeping away in its

destructive wake all the hard-won prosperity of the land, just as the war had such a short time before. It awakens in John a vision:

John sat amid the deepening shades on the long gallery of the old plantation house, fighting off the gathering mosquitoes, and listening to the dull slosh of the muddy water all around against the house and fences. Then would his meditations take on a most sombre hue. The questions of races and heredity would come up in their most formidable shapes. His intense love for Bamma would reconcile him to their individual union; but what of their progeny? Would they not revert to the darker type? Would they not betray with successive generations the ignoble mark of African descent? Then, if such marriages were not mere liaisons, but genuine marriages, they must be as allowable and justifiable to other parties as to themselves; and if miscegenation should become general, would not the whole Southern race, of which he was instinctively and organically proud, be precipitated headlong into a gulf of degradation, degeneration, and despair? Was not his own unfortunate mésalliance a proof and a prophecy of the possibility of a general drifting towards that gulf? (pp. 246-47)

John is forced to confront traditional prejudices by accident; if his wife had not been discovered to have black ancestry, he would never have considered the problem on other than an abstract (and absolutist) level. Given the situation, in order to love Bamma he must rebel against the social system. To do so, he believes, would be to endanger southern civilization.

The gulf of the title, Towards the Gulf, is miscegenation. John's conclusion is that "Extinction might be, after all, the kindest destiny" (p. 252), and that, of course, is exactly what has happened to the white blackbird and what will happen to Bamma. She is pregnant when she hears the awful truth, and chloroforms herself, choosing to die rather than to inflict pain on her husband. But her plans go awry: she is delivered posthumously of a premature boy, which lives. True to the fears of the father, the boy is dark and has Negroid features (though the family tell

everyone defensively that it is the Huguenot strain coming out). The father hates him for his darkness and treats him cruelly. The boy steals and lies, performing acts which the father takes as confirmation that his "blood" is bad. But Buckner makes it clear that the boy is bad not because of his genes but because of his father's cruel treatment. When finally John strikes out at the child, who has stolen some bon-bons and then lied about it, Celine reveals that Bamma's death was not a natural one, that she sacrificed herself to spare him pain. Morant is horrified at his own cruelty, but not particularly sorry that Bamma is dead. In the French Market he has a vision of the racial future:

Certain types presented themselves more frequently than others. The burly African, with flat nose, protruding, sensual mouth, and shining ebony skin, the smirking mulatto, aggressive in the first step towards the higher plane, the pathetic, darkeyed quadroon who sees the shadow not yet lifted, the pale, consumptive octoroon struggling with the burden of physical weakness--these seemed almost sinister in their constant reappearance. They represented to his morbid vision the foundations of a social structure which philanthropy and the coming years were to erect.

The sentimental side of his nature could comprehend the force of the abstract as well as actual presentation of the claims of the sad-eyed women to be raised from the lowliness of their estate. Since the world began, men's hearts have responded to the pitiable condition of woman's condition, the slavery of it appealing to them as all bondage appeals.

He could well understand the potency of sex as a factor in the case. If his own child's eyes had looked up to him from a sweet girl-face, challenging the height and depth of human love, they would have been invested with a pathos touching the measure of human sympathies; but all the intellectual pride and strength of his nature protested against the degradation of a mongrel race. (pp. 300-01)

For Morant, impulses toward "philanthropy" seem false and dangerous, inspired only by lust. He easily resists male claims to justice, even in his own child. But because he finds sexual satisfaction in pitying



powerless women, he is more willing to compromise his principles in their behalf.

Bamma is dead and can no longer affect Morant. The boy, even more innocent than the mother, becomes the means by which Morant is brought to re-examine racial boundaries in other than a sexual context. In a dramatic scene, the boy tells black Uncle Dan'l that he knows his father does not love him and asks the old man to pray for him. Immediately thereafter the child is pulled into the machinery of a cotton gin and fatally injured. As he lies close to death, the father feels all barriers broken down and knows that he loves him. However, Buckner tells us that

It was better so. In life there could have been no happy meeting face to face. Death had only made them equals--unless after death, also, the distinctions of race are preserved forever. But somewhere there must be light. Would he ever see it? And would he some day meet them both again, his wife and child, with the pressure of this "unintelligible world" lifted from his soul? At least, for this life, he had escaped the gulf towards which he had been drifting. (p. 309)

Morant escapes the gulf, but only through the sacrificial deaths of his wife and child. The means of their deaths are in both cases made quite specific, and both seem chosen for their symbolic suggestiveness. Bamma chloroforms herself, anesthetizing, paralyzing, lulling herself into the ultimate passivity. The child is killed by the cotton gin, which for many of these writers is (along with mechanized sugar-refining equipment) the emblem of the New South, superseding slave labor, turning the old crops to new profit, changing the pastoral landscape to an industrial one. This industrialization threatens to rob the South further of her distinctive identity, and it implies acceptance

of a new set of values as well. Thus it is an appropriate agent of death, impersonally chewing up the child who is the disrupting, disturbing product of the sins of the Old Order so that business can go on as usual for the white patriarchy which retains control.

John is changed by his experience, becoming "an unostentatious but energetic friend of the negro race. He assists them personally on every proper occasion, and advocates their systematic education and their rights to untrammelled citizenship" (p. 313). Though this statement is somewhat patronizing, the facts indicate that Morant has truly undergone a transformation. But the central message of Towards the Gulf is unmistakable: "Extinction is the kindest destiny." It is also the most convenient. The individual problem is solved; John Morant no longer has to wrestle with his conscience. But Towards the Gulf implies that the solution is inadequate: the fundamental question remains unanswered.

Walworth's Without Blemish: Today's Problem was published in 1886, a year before Towards the Gulf. It also explores the conservative stance, which prohibits acceptance of mixed marriages, even while hinting that many objectionable "black traits" are the result of environment instead of heredity. Mrs. Stanhope, an aging widow who has lost a husband, two sons, and a brother in the war, decides to adopt a girl to comfort her when her one remaining son goes off to college. The child she chooses, Ginia, refuses to leave the orphanage without a slightly older, darker girl named Olga, who has been a friend to her. Mrs. Stanhope accepts both, but she treats Ginia as a daughter and Olga as a servant. Eustis, Mrs. Stanhope's son, falls in love with Olga. Meanwhile Rose, a former slave who left the plantation during the war, returns to the neighborhood, sees Ginia, and discovers by the trinkets

hung around her neck that the girl is her daughter. She tells no one, intending to protect Ginia so that she can lead the life of a lady.

Rose tells her mother, old Dora, that one of the girls is hers, and Dora assumes she means the darker Olga. A storm catches Olga out at Dora's cabin, and when she shelters there Dora tells her that Rose is her mother. Olga goes bravely off to live in a slave cabin, resolved to devote her life to educating negroes. Rose continues to protect Ginia, but she feels guilty enough to make herself a servant to Olga.

Young Dr. Maddox comes to the area and falls in love with Ginia. On their wedding night, Rose asks to be her dressing maid and in a fit of love reveals her identity. Horrified by the revelation, Ginia repudiates her. Rose, apparently consumptive, coughs up blood and dies. Ginia backs into the fireplace, the tulle of her wedding gown catches fire, and she is fatally charred by the time the fire is extinguished. Before she dies, however, she tells Olga about the existence of a letter which proves that Olga is of pure parentage. Ginia, it seems, has known about her ancestry but concealed the information in order to protect her self.

Here fortunes are dramatically reversed. Olga and Eustis are now free to marry, and they even receive a legacy from her mother's family, who turn out to be living in the neighborhood. The implication is that God was kinder to barbeque Ginia than to let her bear the double burden of illegitimacy and black blood. Again, the hero is spared moral conflict by the death of the woman and is allowed to drown his sorrow by educating negroes--though in justice to Maddox, he had been involved in the project before Ginia's death. Indeed, Olga and Eustis too devote their lives to this cause, and much of the novel is made up of lectures

concerning the need to lift up negroes morally, spiritually, and intellectually so that they can be good citizens. Again, the message seems to be that, while the ways of society are cruel and perhaps wrong, in the world as it is "extinction is the kindest destiny" for the mulatto woman. There can be no comfortable resolution; only self-annihilation can remove the taint.

Alice Ilgenfritz Jones, in Beatrice of Bayou Têche, takes a more radical approach to the mixed blood story.<sup>12</sup> Beatrice is both a nostalgic defense of slavery as a benevolent institution and a fierce cry for freedom and autonomy. Beatrice, though she looks white, has a trace of black blood. She lives with her grandmother, Salome, and Miss Rosamond La Scalla, an elderly invalid, in New Orleans, secluded from the outside world. Miss Rosamond dies before Salome can persuade her to free Beatrice, who has been so thoroughly sheltered that she does not even realize that she is a slave until she and her grandmother are inherited by the La Scallas on Bayou Têche. Evalina La Scalla, a girl near Beatrice's age, takes her as a servant, though she treats her not as a slave but as a friend. Beatrice likes Evalina but hates her cousin Helen, who treats her with childish cruelty and contempt. Beatrice and Burgoyne, Evalina's brother, are infatuated with each other.

If this novel were marketed today as a paperback, it would be called "a saga of stormy passions." Even in childhood, Beatrice is violently proud, and she often takes revenge on those who hurt her by using pets and wild animals, with which she enjoys a mysterious ability to communicate. When the despised Helen tries to steal the baby birds

<sup>12</sup> Beatrice of Bayou Têche (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1895).

Beatrice has been watching, Beatrice sets two vicious bloodhounds on her, reversing the master/slave pattern. In another incident, Burgoyne gives Beatrice a baby deer, and she raises it to maturity. A few years later Helen asks for it, and Burgoyne carelessly agrees. Overhearing their conversation, Beatrice is deeply hurt; despite her love of animals she shoots the deer rather than give it up. In refusing to submit to the wills of the slaveowners, Beatrice again employs their own violent methods and jealously protects her own power over living things. The two episodes are both explained as examples of her fierce pride, but even in context they seem cruel and excessive.

Jones attempts to take an honest look at slavery and freedom in Beatrice. The elderly La Scallas represent the two sides of the abolition question: M. La Scalla is for educating blacks, paying them for their labor, and eventually setting them free. His plantation is run in a benevolent and enlightened manner. His wife, however, represents the conservative justifiers of the system:

She argued that slavery must and would continue to exist, co-extensive with American civilization; it was preposterous to conceive of anything different. And upon this assumption she built a tolerably logical superstructure, and reasoned so eloquently as to convince herself at least, and sometimes others, that she was expounding the fixed principles of her faith, instead of elaborating in a most graceful and womanly way a mere ephemeral sentiment. (pp. 107-08)

Jones is scornful of those who simply parrot old arguments; hindsight alone, since Beatrice was written some three decades after the war, indicated that slavery was not "co-extensive with American civilization."

Nevertheless, although the book unquestionably favors abolition, Yankees are portrayed invariably as villains, as more prejudiced, more cruel, more rude and materialistic than any Southerner would ever be. In fact, the insult given to Beatrice by a Yankee tourist causes M. La Scalla to have a stroke and die. His will frees Beatrice and her mother, against Madame La Scalla's wishes, and Beatrice and Evalina are put in a prestigious girls' school in the North, where no one but the headmistress knows Beatrice's race. Beatrice predictably reverts to type and discovers that she has unusual musical talent; she is soon asked to sing at a charity event sponsored by high society. Although she is an enormous success, in mid-concert, through a chain of coincidences, her secret leaks out, and the other star refuses to sing with her.

Herr Wilhelm, Beatrice's voice teacher, sees commercial advantages to her social disgrace, as a curiosity which could draw crowds in New York, but the Northern pillars of society are prejudiced: "To think that she, Mrs. Priestly, had been asked to sing in public, with a colored slave girl,--and by people who knew! It was an unheard-of affront" (p. 281). Other northerners, projecting their own feelings onto Madame La Scalla, believe that she has cynically "foisted her handsome ex-slave girl upon New York aristocratic society" (p. 266) to prove a point. All Yankees are portrayed as rude and misguided.

Beatrice is embittered by the episode; she has quite literally been denied a public voice, and now she refuses to sing at all. She begins painting, an art often taken up by characters in these novels as a second choice because it is safely commercial, wordless, and therefore more feminine and less political than other creative pursuits. At

length she returns to Bayou Têche to attend Evalina's wedding.

Burgoyne, now married to her enemy Helen, pays a great deal of attention to Beatrice and kisses her under the mistletoe. Helen, enraged, drowns herself. Beatrice retreats to Italy. There she hears of the Civil War and Burgoyne's heroic death, and she learns that Helen's marriage to Burgoyne was unhappy before Beatrice returned to Bayou Têche. He had earlier asked to be freed of his engagement, wanting to marry Beatrice instead. This revelation clears Beatrice of guilt and allows her some measure of happiness, although again, a deus ex machina has killed one of the partners, avoiding the complications of an actual marriage.

Burgoyne, like his father, is a kind of disembodied spirit, a symbol of gallant manhood. He "was one of the royal scions of nature born to receive the generous, free-will homage of the multitudes,--a homage that depends not so much upon what a person does as upon what he is. . . . he is Young-Manhood itself, haloed by all the bright possibilities of glorious, free, untrammelled life." Even the slaves "rejoice in him" (p. 115). In other words, his situation is the converse of Beatrice's, and it stems from the same arbitrary system of judging human beings. Despite their many chivalrous virtues, both Burgoyne and his father fail Beatrice in crucial ways. Why, for instance, doesn't M. La Scalla free Beatrice and Salome at once rather than waiting for his death? Rather than defending Beatrice from the jibes of the Yankee tourist, he dies, unable to handle the confrontation. Why does Burgoyne, who supposedly loves Beatrice, carelessly give away her pet to a rival, agree to marry that same rival, and then drive his wife to suicide by his public display of passion for Beatrice? Beatrice has good reasons to feel betrayed and used.

Especially as a young girl she is filled with rage, but her rage is unfocused, often misplaced. Burgoyne is to blame for Beatrice's troubles far more often than Helen, whom he manipulates. But Beatrice is unable to admit anger toward him, so she directs it toward Helen. The two women act out the conflict, while the man stays comfortably aloof. Beatrice and Helen actually have a great deal in common, but because they cannot speak of rage and lust and hatred, they work against each other and have no feeling of kinship.

Jones is particularly explicit in describing Beatrice's reactions to the discovery that she is a slave and thus subject to the will of others. When she is to be transported to the plantation, she is suddenly plagued by self-doubt:

There were a hundred places where she might have hidden herself, or the awakening consciousness of herself, as an identity, as something apart, which startled her. She was beginning to lose the serene confidence of childhood, to feel the instinct of self-protection, and to realize her helplessness. A sense of strangeness and isolation was upon her like that she had experienced at Miss Rosamond's funeral. She seemed to not touch the universe at any point, but to be spinning off into voidness--that awful sensation one sometimes has in a dream. (p. 75)

Much later in the novel Jones returns to this theme; Beatrice's initiation into the ways of the world has been an initiation into alienation:

A long time ago a sense of separateness had begun to grow in Beatrice. . . . Now it seemed to her there was complete isolation. She could have no fellowship with her intellectual and moral equals ever again,--not even in books! She remembered in this new illumination of her understanding, that there were no delightful stories written about people in her condition, that history itself took no account of slaves. (p. 181)



Overt statements like these stand out in bold relief in a nineteenth century popular novel. This is the kind of thinking we tend to associate with the Civil Rights movement, with the raised consciousness of the sixties, or with novelists of Faulkner's or Warren's stature.

Beatrice's emotions are, in fact, strikingly similar to those described at length by Joanna Russ<sup>13</sup> and by Gilbert and Gubar, among others, of women who wanted to write in the nineteenth century: they faced the realization that the culture, literary as well as social, was overwhelmingly patriarchal and thus alien, that all a woman could realistically expect was an initiation into submission, and that to assert one's individuality and freedom was to court disaster. Beatrice herself is far too busy coming to terms with her blackness to devote much thought to her femaleness, but her creator makes a number of references which equate femininity with slavery while commenting on the complex nature of human relationships: "Even now Salome clung to the memory of her imperious mistress as a loyal wife clings to the memory of a husband who has not always merited her devotion" (p. 80). Miss Rosamond, in turn, is entirely dependant on her slave, who therefore has power over her. And Jones uses black characters to provide an oblique comment on the attitudes of whites, under the guise of comedy. An exchange between the slaves Calisty and Uncle Smiley can pass for comic relief, except that it so closely parallels Beatrice's ironic perception of the mistress/slave relationship. Uncle Smiley tries to get help in lifting some heavy boxes, and Calisty volunteers when the men won't. "Uncle Smiley followed as nimbly as he might, feebly deprecating the

<sup>13</sup> How to Suppress Women's Writing (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1983).

necessity of accepting such assistance from the weaker sex" (p. 5).

These parallel ironies hinge on the fact that the submissive character is in some ways stronger, more in control than the nominally superior.

Beatrice, even more than other mixed-blood heroines, seems to serve as a kind of alter-ego for the author. Her black blood is both a disguise and a way to create distance between author and heroine. It also makes her story a strikingly apt representation of what many feminist critics define as the prevalent theme for female writers, the "fall" into submission and the loss of identity and freedom which this fall involves. Mary Kelley writes in Private Woman, Public Stage about the conflict experienced by nineteenth-century women who were educated and raised in a male intellectual environment but given no respectable channel for the ambitions fostered by such an upbringing.<sup>14</sup> Many Louisiana women novelists were raised in this contradictory atmosphere. (See their collective biographies in Chapter I.) Kelley explains that two conflicting sets of expectations were raised in such women, and because they could never satisfy either they suffered constant anxiety. The mixed-blood story treats a similar unresolvable internal conflict originating in what the authors saw as opposite hereditary traits from both master and slave.

Mary McClelland's Mammy Mystic explores the nature of this conflict through Eugénie, Mammy's granddaughter.<sup>15</sup> Mammy has secretly substituted her for the still-born white child who would have inherited the

<sup>14</sup> Private Woman, Public Stage: Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1984).

<sup>15</sup> Mammy Mystic (New York: Merriam, [1895]).

plantation. Eugénie learns of the terrible secret of her ancestry when her grandmother dies in her arms, yet she guiltily continues to pass as white, marrying and bearing a child. She often reverts to type, singing and giving in to superstition, but the real conflict arises when her husband becomes obsessed with hereditary defects. Eugénie has a weak character; she is manipulative and she lies. McClelland, though, is sympathetic, explaining,

There were, back of the girl, generations of slave-owners, generations which had believed in the strong arm, and the dominating intellect, generations which had made themselves a law unto themselves, and brooked no outside interference. And there were generations behind her that had cringed and submitted; generations which had lived and perished in cowardly ignorance, and savage superstition. In her veins met the blood of two races--the one, bold, careless, little troubled by ethical values; imbued in blood and brain with certain prejudices, beliefs and acceptances; the other, adaptable, imitative, without spirituality of the nobler sort, and imbued also in blood and brain with the reflex of those other prejudices and beliefs. Given such commingling the result is inevitable. A mongrel rarely embodies the best of either race. The white blood within Eugénie despised the black--and the black accepted the scorn as a matter of course, and shared in it." (pp. 223-24)

Contemptuous of part of herself, Eugénie can never be whole or happy. Her mirror-image is presented in Chance, Mammy Mystic's grand-daughter, the coal-black product of the union of a mulatto with a black man. Mammy, furious with her daughter for marrying a "nigger," has "malevolently labelled" the baby Chance, pretending that she resembles a mongrel pup with that name.

Eugénie and Chance become fast friends, one blacker than her mixed blood would suggest, the other whiter. Ironically, Eugénie is sent North by her uncle and aunt to separate her from Chance. McClelland remarks that

It suggested itself to neither that the very years of childhood which they held of little importance are in reality the most impressionable of human life. Nor did it occur to them that servile companionship might have reflex action on matter more important than language and deportment. Their belief in inherent race difference was instinctive. (pp. 79-80)

Of course, the ironic point is that Eugénie and Chance are literally kin; Mammy Mystic is their grandmother. McClelland strongly suggests that all behavior is learned, and that distinction of race, despite her earlier comments about Eugénie's warring blood, are artificial. The reasons for Eugénie's inner conflict do not interest her so much as the nature of the battle itself. Eugénie does not always act admirably: she withdraws from her husband, lies, and attempts to destroy his threatening treatise about inherited defects. But her character and the motives for her actions are strongly developed. Total honesty would bring her world down around her. No resolution is possible. Her husband, as he grows progressively more obsessed with the theoretical aspects of inheritance, also goes physically blind, a strong suggestion of his inability to see Eugénie as she really is rather than as an abstract representation of woman or mulatto. Again, extinction seems to be the kindest destiny and the only way out of the dilemma. Eugénie dies of inherited diseases, but she passes on the conflict by revealing the terrible secret to her equally tainted child.

In short, the mixed blood stories insist on the point made deftly by Kate Chopin in "Désirés's Baby,"<sup>16</sup> that women are automatically held responsible for any taint. They are dependent on others for identity

<sup>16</sup> "Désirés's Baby," The Awakening, and Selected Stories of Kate Chopin, ed. by Barbara H. Solomon (1893; rpt. New York: New American Library, 1976), pp. 173-78.

and are thus put in double jeopardy by disclosures about questionable ancestry. In Chopin's story, a young woman, orphaned, marries an aristocratic young man and produces a baby which is obviously mulatto. The husband accuses her of having tainted blood and she flees across the fields with the baby, to disappear and perhaps to die. Her husband burns both her trousseau and the baby's layette, and only at the end of the story does Chopin reveal that it is he who has black blood. Chopin thus points up the irony of the full-fledged miscegenation story: the assumption is that the taint comes from the woman, just as she always stands to lose the most. Significantly, no strong formula portrays a hero dispossessed and cast into doubt about his identity when he discovers his tainted blood--not until Faulkner's Joe Christmas. Mixed-blood stories provided a popular forum which allowed women writers to explore the dangers of their search for identity and independence and to point out the similar ironies in the South's traditional attitudes toward both women and blacks.

## Chapter Seven

### A Feminine World Realized: Elizabeth Bisland Wetmore

Most of the Louisiana women who became minor novelists remained in the South, balancing the demands of domestic and literary duty, trying, through oblique and indirect methods, to understand their ambiguous relationship to their region, their men, and their ex-slaves. Their interest, as we have seen, was focused on the roles of social groups: on how a disrupted traditional society expected certain groups to act and how those groups managed to conform outwardly while individuals within them often privately experienced feelings contradictory to conformity. Few Louisiana women writers would have described their own interest in such terms, and most would probably have insisted that they wrote about romance, patriotism, and loyalty. But their plots, characterization, and dialogue suggest preoccupation with inequitable relationships, with psychological adjustment to the rigid expectations of society, with public and private selves, and with the nature of subjection and freedom.

There is one exceptional novelist in the group we have been examining, Elizabeth Bisland Wetmore. Unquestionably the best writer of the group, she treats romance, patriotism, and loyalty with overt irony. Wetmore's work exemplifies a distinct step in the development of Southern writing from the humorless rhetoric of post-war patriotism to the wit and irony of writers like Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor.

Her sophisticated prose is light and understated; she is never melodramatic, even when she explores her own sentimentality. Although she was born no later than the majority of other writers treated in this dissertation, her major works appeared considerably later than theirs, when she was middle aged and the twentieth century was well launched. Her early biography is very similar to those of many of her contemporaries. Yet she left the South at nineteen, became a professional journalist, and was exposed to a cosmopolitan array of artists and writers. Perhaps such exposure broadened her perceptions and gave her the freedom and the confidence to express herself in language free of Victorian hyperbole.

Elizabeth Bisland was born with the Civil War on February 11, 1861, on Fairfax Plantation in Louisiana, near Natchez, Mississippi.<sup>1</sup> Her father, Thomas Shields Bisland, was trained as a physician, but he had inherited wealth and preferred to live as an aristocratic planter. Like many planter families, the Bislands claimed an impressive geneology: they were descended from a long line of English noblemen, including the Lord Mayor of London under Queen Elizabeth, and the last Spanish governor of Louisiana. But the war uprooted the Bislands and disrupted their genteel life. Elizabeth's father joined the Confederate army and was soon pressed into service as a military doctor. Her mother fled before invading Union forces in an army ambulance with baby Elizabeth and a slightly older child (Elizabeth was to be the second of nine).

<sup>1</sup> Biographical information on Wetmore is derived from Katherine Verdery, "Elizabeth Bisland Wetmore," in Alderman and Harris, Library of Southern Literature, vol. XIII, pp. 5770-72; Grace King, Memoirs of a Southern Woman of Letters; and Julia R. Tutwiler, "The Southern Woman in New York, Part I," Bookman, 18 (Feb. 1904), 624-26.

They took shelter at Fairfax, but the Confederates met Union troops there, and two battles took place on the grounds, raging right through the house. After the war the family lived in poverty. When Elizabeth was twelve, they inherited Fairfax and returned there, though still very poor. Elizabeth's mother wrote verse for the New Orleans Times-Democrat to earn a little money, and, perhaps in imitation, Elizabeth began writing verses in secret.

Her excessive efforts to conceal her identity while she was seeking publication are typical of nineteenth century women writers. She adopted a pseudonym, B. L. R. Dane, sent a sonnet to the Times-Democrat, and in a flurry of caution walked miles to a neighboring village to mail it in order to make sure that even a postmark did not betray her identity. The sonnet was accepted, as were many more poems, and she was so delighted to see her work in print that she didn't care about money or fame. Her cover was finally blown when the editor of the paper wrote to her mother to ask if she knew who this mysterious poet in her area might be. He suspected that he must be an elderly man who had spent a lot of time in England, testifying, if nothing else, to Elizabeth's early powers of imitation. When she confessed, she was given back pay for all the poems and a salaried position on the paper. At seventeen she was a reporter; the position meant escape from obscure poverty and seven younger siblings into the center of Southern culture. Much of what she wrote at the Times-Democrat was filler and social news, but she did manage to participate to some degree in the literary life of the city. She belonged to a literary club led by Grace King and Julia Ward Howe, and she met and became close friends with Lafcadio Hearn, then struggling just as hard as she was. He described her as "Une jeune



fille un peu farouche (there is no English word that gives the same sense of shyness and force)."<sup>2</sup>

As she grew older, Elizabeth seems to have let the force come through increasingly in her personality. Her early career shows an obsessive desire to escape the stifling limitations of the rural South, and her attitude seems to have been a common one. As Gerald Johnson noticed in 1923, "the South seems to be afflicted with some tremendous centrifugal force that hurls artists across her borders like stones from a sling. The heavier the man the farther he flies. Lafcadio Hearn landed in Japan."<sup>3</sup> Deciding that New Orleans was too limiting for a writer, Bisland moved to New York.

She was not alone. Though immediately after the war many Southern women writers remained in the the rural South, in the late nineteenth century Southern women were flocking to New York, the center of the publishing universe, drawn by its exotic promise of glamor, intellectual excitement, and literary fame. They had all heard success stories: lady authors and southern books were tremendously popular. And large numbers of young women were encouraged by friends, by the members of their literary clubs, by their success in writing for local newspapers and in placing a few stories and articles in the magazines, to believe that once they arrived in New York they would be instantly recognized, hired, courted, and published. Probably few of these big fish from small ponds more than half believed this exciting fantasy, but scores of them obviously believed enough in the heady possibility to leave security and local success behind.

<sup>2</sup> Verdery, p. 5770.

<sup>3</sup> Johnson, p. 5.

By 1904 the migration was such a noticeable phenomenon that Bookman, a sort of gossipy forerunner to Publishers' Weekly, ran a two-part article titled "The Southern Woman in New York." The article features both Elizabeth Bisland and Ruth McEnery Stuart as success stories, but its real message is one of warning, suggesting that many are called but few are chosen. The author, Julia Tutwiler, herself an active advocate of women's rights,<sup>4</sup> describes the experience of the typical Southern woman who arrived in New York armed with a few published stories, a few letters of introduction, and the carefully-husbanded nerve necessary to confront hard-boiled editors--typically men--to ask for work. The editors' general attitude toward these hopeful pilgrims was apparently to be courteous and available. After all, they were always scouting for a talent that could sell books and magazines, and women were proving themselves daily in that area. But they were also conscious of a power and position which gave even the callowest young man an aura of paternal wisdom.

In "Southern Women in New York," Tutwiler depicts an imaginary young woman, whose personality combines naiveté and biting intelligence, in search of work. This young woman calls the first editor she meets a "young gentleman--for man is too robust a word to risk in juxtaposition with his faintly coloured personality."<sup>5</sup> He suggests that she "might possibly get something in the fashion line," undercutting even that

<sup>4</sup> Scott, pp. 116-17.

<sup>5</sup> Tutwiler, p. 626.

faint praise with a disapproving inspection of her appearance.<sup>6</sup> His parting shot is even more infuriating to the educated young woman; although he is the one who is ignorant and tactless, she is the one who, being dependent on his good graces, loses face. She tells him that she writes stories,

And then he told me, with kindness and length, about a man named de Maupassant, a Frenchman, who had written a volume of short stories, The Odd Number, which I would do well to study—I could read them, they had been translated. And I was unaware that I proved my claim to the name with which I had derisively dubbed myself [Inexperience] and to his attitude when I eagerly assured him that I had read de Maupassant in the original and that I thought Flaubert, etc., etc. I carried away with me a letter to the effect that I had "a number of breezy sketches and stories to dispose of," and a flourishing conceit which<sup>7</sup> may be forgiven me because of its scorching pangs of dissolution.

Though Bisland insisted to her several biographers that Chester Lord of the Sun, the agent of her own such initiation, was "everything that was courteous, considerate, and charming," she quoted his words to her as, "My dear little girl, pack your trunk and go back home; this is no place for you."<sup>8</sup> She soon proved him wrong, and in the magnanimity of success was able to reconceive his condescension as patience and kindness.

The literary life, though exciting and novel, was a hard one. In order to live, many women did the literary maintenance work that keeps the publishing machine greased, fueled, and grinding. They were secretaries, stenographers, readers, and copyeditors. Tutwiler

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 627.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 627-28.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 631.

describes book reviewing as "the first step toward regular work" and thus a kind of triumph, but she sums up the ambivalence of the experience in one bitter sentence:

The days she spends over her first review, the trembling awe with which she sends it in--a third too long at the very least--the rapture with which she sees in the index that it is published, the curdling disappointment with which she reads it shorn of its finest thoughts and most finished phrases, the Olympian heights of expectation from which she falls when she deciphers the gauge, in dollars and cents, of literary work!<sup>9</sup>

But Tutwiler's literary aspirant always bounces back. She has a substantial ego along with her self-doubt, and she consoles herself by concluding that "the pang of unpaid genius is one of the common experiences of literary life."<sup>10</sup> No doubt she has an inward vision of herself as Chatterton dying in a garrett, a vision easy to sustain living in the grim conditions described by Tutwiler. Tiny, dirty, mean, and airless apartments, rudimentary furniture, loud neighbors, enormous fuel bills, poor food, and overwork are "the Dark Tower which crushes a woman out of the ranks of the literary profession, unless she escapes from it into the reasonable rewards of her craft."<sup>11</sup> If Tutwiler's vision of the literary life is a gloomy one, she never loses sight of the attractions of such a life for a Southern girl like Bisland: "In roomkeeping, she is introduced to a condition of life she could never

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 624.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 630.

have approached within speaking distance of at home,"<sup>12</sup> a freedom to do, speak, and think as she pleased.

Elizabeth Bisland, a sweet-faced girl with a strong will, walked into this world when she was in her late teens, already a veteran of newspaper work, with fifty dollars. She had the right stuff: in 1880, at age nineteen, she was an assistant editor for Cosmopolitan Magazine and had been published in the New York World, the New York Sun, the Illustrated American, the Brooklyn Eagle, Harper's Bazaar, and Puck, where she encountered an ironic reversal of her first literary success as B. L. R. Dane. The editor, believing that she was a man, rejected one of her stories as "too masculine."<sup>13</sup>

The headiness of Bisland's freedom and literary success peaked in 1889, when Cosmopolitan chose her to carry out a publicity stunt. Her assignment was to beat the record of Phineas Fogg in Verne's Around the World in Eighty Days. She made the trip in seventy-six days, writing a chatty travelogue which was published serially by Cosmopolitan and later as a book. Before its appearance, she had never published a signed article, though she had been relatively prolific. She claims that her main reservation about the trip was that it would bring her notoriety.<sup>14</sup> It did. Bisland thus became a kind of celebrity and made many foreign friends, among them Rudyard Kipling and Rhoda Broughton. She began to spend more time abroad, most of it in England.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 627.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 633.

<sup>14</sup> Bisland, A Flying Trip Around the World (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1891), p. 4.

At age thirty, Bisland the snappy independent career woman became engaged. She married Charles Wetmore, a native of Ohio who had become a successful New York corporation lawyer, on October 6, 1891. For a while she gave up writing, concentrating her attention on the novel luxury of building and decorating a house on Long Island and planning and planting its gardens. People spoke of this house as an expression of her personality; perhaps she had intended to seek self-expression now in the more conventional female roles. But she soon began writing again, this time free of the need to make a living and freer, perhaps, to say what she really thought. Her two most original works, A Candle of Understanding and At the Sign of the Hobby Horse, were published in 1903 and 1909; she also produced a two-volume biography, with letters, of Lafcadio Hearn, that earned her an international reputation. Though Bisland obviously had a critical and independent mind, she did bow to some of the conventions of male influence: she received her only major recognition from her glorification of Hearn, and in her book of perceptive essays she insists that writing is for her only a "hobby," dedicating the volume to "the master of the hobby horse"--her husband.<sup>15</sup>

Wetmore exemplifies the typical experience of Louisiana women novelists of this period at the same time that she transcends it by examining it and writing about it. She was not a favorite with the civic-minded Louisianans who glorified other state writers. Yet she found much of her subject matter in the South. A Candle of Understanding is a perceptive analysis of growing up Southern and female

<sup>15</sup> At the Sign of the Hobby-Horse (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin; Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1910). Because she published most of her major work after her marriage, I will hereafter refer to Bisland by her married name, Wetmore.

during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Wetmore describes the experience as having "lived in three centuries," the eighteenth, the nineteenth, and the twentieth, and remembers that "my grandmother with whom I spent much of my childhood brewed her own medicines, distilled her own perfumes, and lived surrounded by the ceremony and observance of the past."<sup>16</sup> In fact, her major works were all produced in the first decade of the twentieth century, when Wetmore was middle-aged and living in New York. Her perceptions and tone are "modern" and irreverent; even if she had been able to write these books several decades earlier, they probably would not have found publishers or sold. She may well have written Blue and Gray (1885), discussed in Chapter Two, in her younger days. The copy in the Louisiana collection, donated by J. Fair Hardin, an avid collector of books by Louisiana authors of the period, attributes it to Elizabeth Bisland. Internal evidence does not contradict the attribution, for despite an emotionalism absent from her later works the novel is exceptionally good at the kind of titillation it attempts; even a reader who laughs at its excess may be trapped into breathless page-turning. Wetmore's description in a later essay about heroines could apply with good-humored accuracy to her own first novel:

[The heroine of the past] followed her mate cheerfully to the battlefield, the debtor's prison, or even the scaffold. When a gentleman cheated at cards, drank more than was good for him, flung away his substance in riotous living, or otherwise made things uncomfortable, the virtuous heroine of the past immediately took in plain sewing (she never appeared to be capable of any other kind), changed her residence to a garret, and lived shiveringly on what was known as 'crusts'; but she

<sup>16</sup> Tutwiler, p. 631.

spoke no word of reproach, and did the uncomplaining-martyr act in its extremest form of aggravating highmindedness.<sup>17</sup>

The description is clearly satirical, but Wetmore was an ardent and perceptive student of popular culture, and possibly she wrote Blue and Gray hoping to produce a best-seller by emulating a popular formula.

If Wetmore really did create this earlier bodice-ripper, then A Candle of Understanding,<sup>18</sup> published in 1903, is even more remarkable. In it she manages to confront directly the contradictions of living in the post-war South and of being female, issues which emerge only in veiled form in the writing of most of her contemporaries. Unlike them, she writes in the first person, creating a character, Marian, who speaks for herself and who allows us to see the development of her consciousness. The chronological narrative, in which the child's perceptions are often clearer and more perceptive than those of adults, takes the heroine from early childhood to middle age. One is tempted to call this a fictionalized autobiography, and indeed it may be, particularly in the earlier segments. It is a Bildungsroman, the story of a girl's growth to maturity in the South over a period which includes the Civil War and Reconstruction.

But Wetmore is a self-conscious artist who is careful to create point-of-view, who has read Henry James, Robert Browning, and Jane Austen, who maintains throughout the novel a generalized irony, cool, aloof, yet sympathetic. She participates in making popular myths even

<sup>17</sup> Hobby-Horse, p. 17.

<sup>18</sup> A Candle of Understanding: A Novel (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1903).



as she deflates them with comic detachment. Understatement and self-irony are her tools; she scorns "moral prepossessions," messages, and lessons,<sup>19</sup> feeling that they always obscure the truth. Her theme is the heroine's search for understanding of her relationship to her defeated country, to men, to other women, to blacks, to other social classes, and, finally, to herself as a woman. Wetmore satirizes the sentimental tradition, the cult of ideal womanhood, and the literary heritage in much the same way Twain did in Huckleberry Finn. Marian hopes by reading to understand the world, but when she opposes these romantic visions to the real world, when she compares the hard realities of the post-war South to the idealized visions of the Old South, she finds no correspondence. Her parents live pathetically in the past, telling the children endless stories about the war, and Marian's blend of fascination and scepticism is evident in her response:

It seems queer to think that a war could have changed everything so. There are lots of people around that are very ugly and stupid and live in shabby little houses built long ago, but there doesn't seem to have been any one before the war who wasn't good-looking and clever, and had lots of money. (p. 145)

Obviously her parents' version is not the whole truth, but young Marian does not at this point know how to revise it effectively.

Marian's search is for a form which will allow her to think and speak the truth in its complexity rather than concealing it with romanticism. She begins very young to write her memoirs, suffering all the while from anxiety of authorship and succumbing to the sensuous

<sup>19</sup>Hobby-Horse, p. 41.

sugary temptations of the sentimental tradition:

The writing of these memoirs was a profound secret even from Edith [her sister], and was accomplished with stubs of pencils in the remotest portions of the garden, or in the stable-loft, and some of the most enthralling passages had been set down while occupying a cramped position on a higher limb of one of the pecan trees. My models of composition had been chosen with care, and like them I had carefully marked in italics what I considered the funny passages, so that no one would be unfortunate enough to miss the joke. [Blue and Gray, interestingly, relies heavily on punctuation for dramatic effect.] My memoirs were, however, of a more uncompromising character than is usual. One of the influences that had led me to the undertaking of them had been a stray volume of pious juvenile literature whose subject was recorded as having at one time been guilty of the most serious crimes, such as neglecting her prayers, failing to search the Scriptures, and the like--and to punish herself she wrote down every night in her diary all the naughty things she had done during the day. Written out, these faults assumed so horrid a complexion that she immediately left them off, and grew better and better, so that eventually even her parents acknowledged their own moral inferiority, and she felt equal to undertaking the conversion and improvement of every one around her--more particularly those in inferior financial circumstances. Once, when she was reproving a poor boy in the snow, she caught consumption and died. (p. 13)

Wetmore's satiric style indicates that the adult Marian is critical of the self-indulgent sentimental tradition which fascinated her younger self. But if the literary models were flawed, the act of writing was courageous, undertaken against fear of criticism and ridicule.

Wetmore's own early conflict between the need to write and the desire for anonymity is clearly a source for Marian's.

Marian, however much she relishes the role, will never be a sentimental heroine. She is a tomboy, resents sewing, and despises dolls and babies. But there is an ideal woman in A Candle of Understanding, Marian's sister Edith, who is a paragon of womanhood.

She is good, gentle, skilled at sewing and sitting still, good-natured. Her favorite game defines her with wicked accuracy:

What Edith liked best was to play that the bud babies [flowers that the children pretend are dolls] had colds. She tore off a piece of jasmine petal to wrap up their throats, and soaked their feet in a rose-leaf full of water. There was a bush by the summer-house that bore long, slender buds that wouldn't sit up, and Edith pretended the bud's name was Kate Grey, that her spine was hurt so she couldn't sit up, and Edith rubbed her back and read aloud to her, and gave her nice little mud jellies, and when my Lady Ethelynda went to call in a plum-leaf litter, Edith's Mrs. Grey came rushing to the door and said: "Shh! shh! Please don't make a noise. Poor Kate has just dropped asleep, and she's had such a bad night." (pp. 61-62)

Such a perfect sister is naturally a thorn in the side of the one who is inevitably expected to emulate her. Marian periodically tries valiantly to be an Edith, but such women are born, not made, and intellectual scepticism is incompatible with Edithism. Yet Edith surprisingly is never again made the subject of even mild ridicule, and emerges throughout the novel an admirable figure, though the kind of heroine Wetmore laughed at in the works of others.

After the war, when the family is living in abject poverty, Edith is the charismatic force that keeps them going:

I don't know what would happen if it weren't for Edith. She looks after everything and makes Willard [the younger brother] behave, and prevents quarrels, and cheers people as much as you can cheer them when things go on being uncomfortable all the time. She never will let me leave any of the silver off the table, no matter how little there is to eat, and is so particular about Willard's manners at dinner, and about everybody behaving all the time as if we had all we wanted. But she owns up herself that it's pretty hard to look highbred and as if you didn't notice trifles when we have to go anywhere in our dreadful tumble-down carriage, with the curtains flapping and tied up with rope; and Jinny is such a funny, dreary little mule, with such terribly long ears, and looks so much too small for that great, old carriage that she is a terrible

discouragement to us when we are behaving as if gentlewomen were indifferent to questions of luxury.

Edith says, "Though the Yankees took everything else from us, don't let them feel they've taken our breeding as well." So, of course, we have to behave beautifully all the time--though I don't believe the Yankees would care, even if they knew. What difference can it make to them about our speaking softly and walking so lightly, and having our hair so smooth, even when we're cooking or chopping wood? (pp. 143-44)

Edith understands instinctively that it is how they feel about themselves that is at stake; they are rather like British officers dressing for dinner in the jungles of India, refusing to give in to forces which would undermine their own sense of civilization. Although the reader tends to sympathize with Marian's practicality, Wetmore nevertheless recognizes that Edith is a heroine. Edith, who has hordes of suitors, refuses one very rich young man because he is a Yankee, but goes on to have a happy marriage with a Southern doctor, bear several children, and adjust easily to the demands of her society. Her life serves as a wistful counterpoint to Marian's later unorthodox adventures. But the two are foils: they complement each other instead of cancelling each other out. Wetmore sets them up as equally viable alternatives, not as saint and monster.

This willingness to accept and glorify complexity in the female character is what Wetmore sees as the primary achievement of women's writing. Long before Gilbert and Gubar, she explores "the old alternating male dreams of the female,"<sup>20</sup> the goddess and the rogue. Her essay on the subject is called "The Morals of the Modern Heroine,"

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

and it traces both male and female attitudes toward fictional women through the centuries:

In our European civilization there has always been a deliciously contradictory attitude in the mind of the male--until recently almost the exclusive maker of literature--toward his female. While never willing to admit her equality with himself, mental or moral, he has yet constantly required of her, has constantly urged upon her, a sublimation of behavior which he was amiably reluctant to demand of himself or of his fellows.<sup>21</sup>

And in another analysis which scoops Gilbert and Gubar by sixty years, she points out that the nineteenth century was in many respects repressive and dull, but that it did provide women with an impressive literary tradition of their own: "By the time the Early Victorian period was reached, virtue, propriety, and colourlessness reigned supreme. The naughty charmer was for the moment in exile; but in the meanwhile, for the first time in the history of literature, women had begun to write about themselves."<sup>22</sup> She goes on to say that

The goddess and the pretty, immoral little hussy were not all forgotten by their male literary adorers; but the "mob of gentlewomen, who wrote with ease," which sprang up, a thick, lettered crop, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, declined to be narrowed down to two sharply contrasting types of the sex, and one began at last to get . . . "the fine shades" of feminine self-revelation.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 4-5.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

She defines two subrevolutions: (1) With the Brontë sisters, "The ugly woman had issued a startling declaration of the right of the ill-featured female to emotion and romance" and (2) "a woman might suffer from romantic emotions after twenty-five without being wholly abnormal," a phenomenon she refers to as the revolution of the "Femme de Trente Ans."<sup>24</sup>

In short, Wetmore suggests that

We must read women's books if we would get new light upon the woman question; if we would study the moral aspect of the matter, and consider the soul of the sex from a really new angle of vision. And reading these women's books by the light of our old prejudices, we certainly have the startled sensation that we have heretofore been moving about in a feminine world unrealized. Either those mild brows have been concealing the most astonishing things, or else the woman of our epoch has suffered a sudden change into something new and strange, and there would seem to be no tie of heredity between the mother of yesterday and the daughter of today.<sup>25</sup>

What Wetmore clearly is saying here is that women have always had independent thoughts, but that they have not always dared express them directly. The feminine world has been unrealized largely because women took pains to keep it that way. In trying to explain the modern shift toward independent, aggressive, and self-indulgent heroines, Wetmore speculates,

These fantastic ethical excursions are in part a natural reaction against a weary period of Victorian virtue that almost amounted to virtuosity, and partly a sowing of literary wild oats by heady femininity, new to the liberty of the pen and not yet settled down to

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

the sober middle age of letters. But there are underlying reasons more serious than these: within the last half-century has occurred a silent, slow upheaval of all the bases of our attitude to life, and the gentler sex have not had any exclusive solidity of footing in the shifting of the moral centres of gravity. They too have been casting about for a new horizon, for new standards of behavior and of personal responsibility, while science and its disquieting discoveries have been levelling the old heights and filling the depths. In the jumbling and readjustment of the patterns of thought, the old models have become inadequate to their needs.<sup>26</sup>

In A Candle of Understanding, as in innumerable books by Wetmore's contemporaries, the upheaval of values is encapsulated in the experience of the Civil War and Reconstruction. "New standards of behavior and personal responsibility" do not spring up full grown, and the process of defining them for oneself can be painful. Marian's sister Edith retains such an inborn sense of role that no upheaval can jar loose her inherited set of standards; Marian herself, though rebellious, is intelligent enough to forge her own.

Edith is admirable both in the terms of the sentimental tradition and in broader human terms, retaining a sense of identity and value even when the supports of wealth and status are pulled out from under her, but other members of Marian's family do not adjust so well. Her mother and father play out tragi-comic roles which capture the desperate economic situation and the relation of men and women to it and to each other. The mother is insistently materialistic and nags the father cruelly about their reduced situation; she has been raised to depend on a strong, financially-stable man for sustenance and status, and she is bewildered by the fact that, although she married prudently, she is suddenly reduced to poverty. She is entirely unmoved by the realities

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

of economics, politics, and the fortunes of war, and sees only that her security is failing her:

Father goes about all the time looking as if somebody had hit him and he couldn't hit them back, and is always having chills and fever, and hardly ever says a word except sometimes when we are sitting on the gallery after supper, and he tells how, if he had a few thousand dollars, he could make lots of money with it. Mother always looks at her hands when he does that--they're all spoiled now--and says, "Well, why don't you get it then, William?" And that always makes him stop short, and he leans back in his chair and never says another word. And, after a while, she says:

"My father always seemed to be able to get money whenever he needed it. I don't think I quite understand how he did it, but supposed all men understood about those things." And when nobody answers, she says: "It seems to me Southern men have changed a good deal since the war. They used to be so much more energetic and capable then." (p. 144)

Wetmore's satire cuts both ways: the father is indeed the victim of impossible economic and political conditions, but he also lacks initiative and prefers whining to working. Occasionally the mother's statements carry overtones of social comment which, with her limited intelligence, she does not intend. When the father explains that they will lose the place if they cannot pay the mortgage and that the sugar crop has been ruined, this dialogue ensues:

"Take the place!" mother cried. "Why William, what nonsense you talk. How can they take it? It's ours!"

"You'll see how they'll do it. It's not our place if the interest on the mortgage isn't paid. . . ."

"It's the most surprising thing to me how men will submit to such outrages from other men. A woman would never permit another woman to take her plantation away from her just because it happened not to be convenient to pay some interest. . . . Well, William, it's your duty to do something about it--for my sake and the children's."

"Do something!" father cried. "Heavens! What can I do--tied to a dying industry which I can't bring back to life and can't let go? Do! It's easy enough to say do!" (p. 130)



Marian's mother seems to hint at the strength and fairness of all-female societies like those which developed during the war, based on kindness and need rather than economics. Women, she says, would not treat each other so. Yet she is as helpless as her husband, clinging to the idea that if a woman marries prudently she is safe for life.

When Edith refuses to marry a wealthy Yankee who has proposed to her, her mother cries. The primary thrust of this scene is to further deify the saintly Edith, to exalt her values at the expense of her mother's. But Wetmore also implies that in a strictly practical sense the mother is right. Because women are economically dependent on men, ethics must take second place in their reasoning. She cries because she fears, not for her daughter's mere social standing, but for her survival. In her we see a woman who, through bitter experience, has rejected all forms of romance and who nevertheless lives in a dream world.

Edith and her mother represent two extremes, while Marian solves the economic problem by finding a lucrative profession and supporting herself. In fact, her story is a series of compromises, and her actions are always the result of a struggle to find a middle ground between the demands of the head and the heart. The fact that the book has a first-person narrator is significant. Few of the novels examined in earlier sections of this study would work as first-person narratives for the simple reason that their authors' attitudes toward life are so ill-defined. But Wetmore is aware of her own division, and is able to project it dramatically rather than polemically, allowing a resolution

in the New Critical sense by employing the tension between apparent opposites to unify the work artistically and provide it with form.

For example, Marian's attitudes toward men and romantic love are ambivalent. She finds young men annoying because their eyes glaze over when she talks about Shakespeare. But she falls hopelessly in love with an aging dilettante named, appropriately, Narcissus Luttrell, who poses handsomely in the moonlight and declaims romantic verse. Marian is willfully blind to the fact that he is a weak alcoholic, dependent on his novelist sister for income. Her romantic fantasies take self-sacrifice as a theme:

It made me perfectly happy just to sit and look at him, and think how I'd like to have an enormous fortune and give it all to him and he never know, while I worked awfully hard, with nothing to eat but corn-bread. Or else, when some one was shooting at him, to throw myself in the way, like the girl in Ouida's book, and have him say, "Poor child! How fond she was of me!" and put wreaths on my tombstone. I wanted to kneel down right there in the wet grass and spread roses out for him to walk on, he did look so wonderful when the moon rose over the hedge and shone on his face, only I'd never seen him like that before, with his cheeks flushed and his eyelids half dropped over his eyes. (p. 186)

Narcissus's beautiful langour unfortunately is a symptom of drunkenness, not poetic inspiration. The experienced Marian can look back on her crush as a product of total immersion in sentimental fiction, yet she admits the power of the attraction. Narcissus's self-love casts a powerful spell, causing Marian, who is hungry for romance and culture, to believe in his image. When he drunkenly makes a mild sexual advance to her in the garden, she is snatched away and forcibly disillusioned. But Narcissus is finally killed in a Reconstruction brawl, leaving

Marian free to romanticize him still further without his troublesome presence to shatter the illusion.

Narcissus is not the only romantic Luttrell: his sister Miss Melusina is equally fascinating to a girl starved for culture. She is an author, writing romances in order to support both herself and her degenerate brother. She is also a war heroine of a rather desperate sort. Narcissus tells Marian about his sister's experiences in the war:

"Yes, Melusina's wonderful," [he said,] and told me a story about her--how two Yankee soldiers had come to the house one day and looted it, and how when his father, who was very old, tried to stop them they brained him with the butts of their muskets.

"The army moved on again next day," he continued, blowing smoke straight above his head, "and Melusina could get no one to punish the men, though she had stood by and seen the murder done; but she never gave up. She followed them for more than a year--petitioning everybody. She got to Washington at last, and kept on petitioning. She persecuted everybody--generals, judges, Senators--even the President--and she finally got a promise of punishment if she could identify the men. So when the army was reviewed and disbanded there, she found them at last--got all the proofs, and stood by while they were hanged, as she had stood by while they had committed the crime!" (pp. 170-71)

Marian is shaken by this revelation: "it seemed so astonishing to think of Miss Melusina--and she so fat and with such queer curls--doing a thing like that" (p. 171).

Not surprisingly, a character like Melusina does not quite conform to the standards of genteel Southern belles. When someone asks her, pompously enough, "And when, Madame, is the South to receive another romance from your gifted pen?" she replies, "Oh, I'm in the throes. . . . A new literary child is just coming to birth" (p. 156). Her metaphor is deliberate and well-chosen for an unmarried woman who is devoted to her career, but one of the ladies is deeply shocked. Miss

Melusina obviously enjoys her own intelligence, and in a delightful scene at the dinner table slyly gets the best of Marian's father without his even realizing that he is being sent up:

By the time they were seated at table father and Cousin Robert were talking to the Luttrells about poetry, and Cousin Susanna was saying to mother, under her breath, so as not to interrupt them: "I put them in salt water to harden, and into lime-water to make them transparent, and as for the surup [sic], it's pint for pound, and boil for three hours--"

Father said: "No, madame, I don't read these modern rhymesters. I hold that English poetry ended with Byron, though even he showed decadence from the art of Pope!"

"My sister is all for Tennyson, Swinburne, and Browning," Mr. Luttrell said. "It seems to me there's a new swan hatched every week, according to her."

"I never heard of them," my father replied, indifferently. "The ladies, you know, Luttrell, are not severely critical in their literary judgements. In my day their favorite was Felicia Hemans. Perhaps you rank these new versifiers beside her, Miss Melusina?"

"Oh, not beside Mrs. Hemans, I think," Miss Melusina said, laughing a little.

"Oh, well, I suppose not--I suppose not. I remember Mrs. Hemans was held very high by the gentler sex. Now to my ruder masculine taste she seemed somewhat insipid--but, no doubt, that was my own fault. Let me give you a bit more of the wing."

The conversation impressed me as having risen to the highest levels. I had never been to a dinner party before, except at Cousin Susanna's where everyone talked about the crops, and the people we knew, and about before the war, and nobody discussed poetry, or used such noble, dignified sentences. No doubt the presence of Miss Melusina had lifted it to this finer flight. (pp. 158-59)

Miss Melusina, having irretrievably relinquished a reputation as pure and passive, has created a new role for herself, as slightly bitchy and risqué. But she seldom has an audience who can appreciate her. After all, in this world ladies discuss preserves, and gentlemen lack her knowledge.

Marian looks somewhat doubtfully to Miss Melusina as a model, but her own ambition is not to write but to act. She plays at it often,

preferring men's parts: "most of the women are silly, sloppy sort of creatures, but the men have such nice, big rolling sentences" (p. 140). She literally rejects traditional women's roles as unfulfilling. But when she confides her ambitions to Miss Melusina, even this unconventional woman is shocked. She soon sees the logic of Marian's ambition in light of the new state of things:

"Ladies don't act, you know."

"No, I know they don't and I suppose it's horrid even to want to . . . ."

"You queer little creature! But, after all, ladies used not to sweep and make beds, either. The world is upside down these days. Ladies used not to write, for that matter. Your cousin Susanna thought I was about to be damned when my first book, The Last of the Mohuns, was printed, and now the whole neighborhood is rather proud of me--only they wouldn't want any of their womankind to do it. Even Narcissus was shocked at first. The men felt he was rather lacking in proper pride to let me take money for my work; Lucy Rohelia said, "My dear, what becomes of modesty, the delicate reserve of womanhood if the vulgar world can know all your secret thoughts just by paying a dollar and a half?" She used to write nice little verses herself--in her scrap-book. But acting! Oh, fie, Marian! Even I'd feel queer to think of any one I knew doing that. Girls ought to marry."

"But you didn't, Miss Melusina."

"No, but only because poor Cousin George was killed at Lookout Mountain. I never liked any one else. Besides, though all our gentlemen thought I did quite right in Washington, yet somehow the notion of marrying me made them sort of uncomfortable. I never had another offer." (pp. 173-74)

Miss Melusina is a representation of the earlier generation of Southern women writers, the tough, self-reliant women who wrote to support themselves and their families and to attempt some understanding of the harrowing yet rewarding lives they had led during the war and Reconstruction. Like them, she is liberal to a certain extent, but wary of testing established codes too rigorously. Marian, on the other hand,

is determined to challenge the boundaries, with logic and reason as her weapons.

Marian does go to New York and become an actress, and one of Wetmore's central points is made by a young actress, Miss Percy, who plays the villainess in a popular melodrama. Marian questions her about her stylized red, white, and black makeup, and Miss Percy indignantly explains the risks of defying the public conception of the way things are:

Don't you suppose I know that adventuresses don't always have white cheeks and wear low, black gowns, and grit their teeth, and supple their hips, and ain't always doing the cower act? Why, in real life it would give them dead away the very first thing; but the public likes to place you. I tried to be natural when I began, and what did the critics say? "Miss Percy would do well to avoid straining after eccentricities of interpretation." I had the horse-sense to see they were right, and what do they call it now? Why, "the powerful grasp of her conception of a nature steeped in vice," or "the subtle human element of Miss Percy's interpretation of a difficult part." (p. 239)

Marian, through the literal playing of roles in the theatre, begins to learn the rewards that follow acting as one is expected to act. Wetmore inevitably connects this experience to Marian's sense of kinship with black women. Just as she tries on male roles, she also tries on black roles. When a young girl pretending to be an actress, Marian's favorite role had been that of Othello. As a young professional, her first job is playing a black serving woman. And her experience with the public is similar to Miss Percy's: people want to see a stereotyped portrayal of such a character, not one which introduces complexity. Again, it is safest to play one's role in conformity with tradition. Yet Marian is

determined not to accept the stereotype, and finally wins acclaim for her "original" portrayal, based on childhood memories of a black nurse.

Marian has good reason to feel strongly about Northern falsifications and simplifications of Negro character. Though she has grown up in a family that supports the Klan and resents black political influence, she has also lived in close contact with black women. She is fascinated as a child by a black woman from Africa who can describe African customs and dances. And she is inseparable from a black girl her own age, Chaney, who is wild and sassy and who encourages her to do naughty things. Chaney is an alter-ego; she can get away with wildness because of her color, while Marian is restrained by her status and her sex. Black girls, like white boys, have considerable freedom, and there is a note of wistfulness in Marian's prim lecture to Chaney: "Little girls ought not to be thinking all the time about how they can amuse themselves. Life is very serious, and we ought to prepare for its duties by working and thinking instead of playing" (p. 80).

Marian knows the difference between saying what you ought to say and saying what you mean, even as a very small child. She can, by extension of her own experience, read the double language of blacks who play "good nigger" roles. Early in A Candle of Understanding, Wetmore presents this scene:

It was morning, and we had been left at the mouth of a small, brown river . . . where we found four row-boats and a dozen big negro men in very ragged blue jeans. Father said:

"Well, boys, I'm glad to see you waiting for us." They pulled at their wool and scraped their right feet along the ground a little, and said, boistrously:

"Howdy, marster! Howdy, mistus! We suttently mightly glad ter see you-all back home ag'in. Dem Rebs en Yankees been cuttin' up the outragousest didoes down on de plantation sence you-all went off ter de war. Dey've clean to' things loose, and bus' up all de

levees, so de water done come over de roads, and we'all 'bliged ter come fer yer troo de swamps."

"Well, you're all free men now," father said.

"Yaas, sir! Freedom done come out."

"And how do you like it? he asked. They bashfully dug their bare toes into the ground and remained silent until baby, whom one of the men had taken to put in the boat, cried and hit out with his little hands, because he was afraid of the black face. The negroes began to laugh and whoop.

"Ay yi! Look at de little marster larrupin' Munger a'ready. Bless gracious, ef he ain't a born fighter, mon! He gwine ter make all you niggers stand 'round soon's ever he git good and steady on his foots." And they evaded further discussion by rowing us away into the woods. (p. 27)

Only the last sentence gives Wetmore away. Until then, the portrayal fits right in with the plantation tradition of mindlessly loyal blacks. But tiny Marian, already forced into a role she is unable to embrace because of her intelligence and drive, instinctively understands both the overdrawn sentimental rhetoric and the need to evade further lies. Her later decision to act professionally reflects her fascination with enforced role-playing.

Indeed, Wetmore seems deliberately to have chosen Marian's profession, even further outside the pale for a woman than writing, not only for its scandalous overtones but because it allowed her to confront more directly the issue of "roles" for women. Making art out of necessity, Marian ironically becomes not an outcast but a romantic and envied figure. She is sought after by genteel and secure married women, and inevitably is invited to speak to a women's club about acting. Wetmore spoofs the women gently even while making them part of an exploratory dialogue about the best life for a woman. Mrs. Calder, the lady in charge, is charmed by the theatrical life, though she has a beautiful home and a loving husband, a life which Marian regards



somewhat enviously. She wants to discuss the question of marriage versus career with Marian:

"You lead a grand life, don't you?" she exclaimed as she passed the pickles. "And that Englishman, Courtney, is delightful. It's the kind of life I should like myself. Sometimes I think it's a mistake for a woman to marry," she went on, in answer to the gesture of protest I made, my mouth being full of ham. "But I was so young when Tom proposed. A trousseau seemed to be all any girl wanted then."

"Oh, my dear woman," I remonstrated, cutting the chocolate cake. "Fancy your having to put up with the sort of thing you saw in that hotel!"

"Oh, well, of course! I know I've got the best house in town, but just to think how you're able to develop your own individuality. After all," she said, pushing back her plate with a small frown, "the mere material comforts ain't everything. The mental and spiritual sides of life are a good deal more important, seems to me."

"But isn't marriage compatible with that?" I asked, in surprise. "You have so much leisure for self-cultivation."

"Well," she commented, rising and beginning to put the dishes together. "I think marriage is dreadfully cramping. But I guess we'd better be getting to bed. To-morrow will be a real busy day, if the club is to meet here." (pp. 258-59)

If we view this conversation as the two sides of Wetmore's own personality debating, what emerges is a conviction that both courses, career and marriage, are important and fulfilling, and that they oughtn't be mutually exclusive. Marian appreciates the benefits of love and material security, but both she and Wetmore were driven to pursue fame and self-expression.

Wetmore apparently made a wise and happy marriage which encouraged her to develop as an artist and gave her the leisure to do so. But Marian is faced with a familiar female dilemma when her childhood friend, Lorraine Quentel, unexpectedly reappears and asks her to marry him. He arrives on the scene just as she is feeling lonely, weary of the hardships of theatrical life, and envious of the serene Edith and

her four children. But he disapproves of her acting and refuses even to go to the theatre to see her. When he proposes that she return to the South with him to restore the old plantation, she refuses:

"But, Lorraine--my work!" I protested with an uneasy leap of the heart.

"Work! That damned acting! I won't have you put up for any blackguard to stare at who can afford the two dollars. You've got to give it up."

"Give it up! You've no right to talk that way" I said indignantly. "I am an artist, and I'm quite famous, too. Besides," feeling that I'd found a point of advantage, "it's made my bread for me all these years. Was I to sit down and let poor Edith take care of me?"

"No--perhaps not, but I'm here to take care of you now."

"Well, you weren't here all this time," I said, sharply, struck with remorse as soon as the words were out." (pp. 289-90)

Again, Marian is faced with a discrepancy between her traditional role and the reality of her ambition. Lorraine, in the classic romantic fashion, has remained faithful to her memory in a way that she cannot fathom. She is fond of him as a brother, but he cannot replace the object of her most secret romantic fantasies, the long-dead Narcissus:

I've heard a good deal about love--most actresses have, of course--and generally it was the sort of thing I'd had to slip around and put off and evade as well as I could, and then laugh over to myself when it had taken itself indignantly away. Only usually when it was gone I had sat down and taken my head in my hands and breathed a long breath and remembered an old sunken grave that all the rest of the world had forgotten long ago. (pp. 292-93)

She lets Lorraine go.

That night, Marian has an emotional experience which surprises her and astonishes her sophisticated companions. At a play, no doubt one of the many plantation dramas popular at the time, a Confederate flag is

brought out on stage and Dixie is played. Marian bursts into tears, moved not by the melodrama but by the associations called up by the flag and the song. She has had this experience before as a child, weeping at the combination of flag and song even though she is thoroughly disgusted by her parents' nostalgia for ante-bellum days. When her friends tease her and demand an explanation for her naive behavior, she begins to try to understand her sentimental attachment to the South and to the way of life she had fled and almost forgotten.

"It's those rivers and rivers of blood--all those dear men and boys killed--and those wounds and the suffering--all the starvation--and the humiliation and the sacrifices we made--for that flag. And now it's gone! We'll never see it again--all that agony just wasted--and for nothing--nothing!" I shook with hysteria. "Don't you see --don't you see? It was all thrown away!" (p. 301)

Marian's impassioned cry, uttered in the presence of the gay and unsentimental people who prefer to regard the Civil War as a romantic tale or a long-ago foreign mess, sums up the tone of her many Louisiana contemporaries. She voices the ironic ambivalence of women's view of the war: it was both a tragic waste and the occasion for acts of great nobility which would have been possible in no other context. Her recognition of this fierce love for the South, made more dramatic because of the mocking disbelief of her companions, is one cause of her sudden resolution to marry Lorraine after all.

The admission of her own sentimentality, and of the romantic illusions she has continued to cherish in relation to Narcissus Luttrell, free Marian from her dilemma. She realizes that in rejecting the sad sentimental South she has fled to an extreme which is equally false. The gay, brittle society she has chosen has forced her to reject

a part of herself, to play a role that is almost as restrictive as that of the ideal Southern lady. At first glance the novel seems to take a disappointingly conventional turn in reverting to marriage as the only way to dispose of a heroine. This heroine has a successful career and a good income, and she is not romantic in her attachment to Lorraine. Why does she marry him? The answer seems to be that Marian has reached the final step in the creation of a self. She has defied the conventions, made it on her own, learned from experience, made her own choices. She has completed the male initiation experience, testing herself in relation to the world, not the female initiation into submission. She has learned, before Lorraine's reappearance, that acting is no longer enough for her, that she wants love and companionship. On the strength of experience, she has been able to refuse Lorraine and to ignore his disapproval of her career. She has achieved what she set out to do: she has created an independent self. Early on, she has renamed herself, from Mary Ann to Marian. Many novels by Louisiana women emphasize the relationship of names to essence, and several heroines rename themselves. Wetmore is emphatic about the psychological significance of such labels:

My conviction was deep and immovable that had I been named something really pretty like [Edith], I would have found it easy to sew neatly and know my lessons and never break or lose things, and that it would have been wholly unnecessary to say to me so frequently, "You may go to your room, Mary Ann, and sit and think how troublesome you've been." (p. 11)

Marian chooses her own label and her own role, but both are inevitably only variations on what she already is. She cannot choose to be Edith, only to be a refinement of Mary Ann. Her engagement to

Lorraine Quentel springs from the same source; she cannot reject her past, and he embodies it. Marian writes:

My life, that had seemed so vivid and important to me, I know now didn't really matter at all. What I wanted was something quite different. What I really wanted was home--and Lorraine.

Why should I go on acting? It was horrid to think of a whole long life made up of nothing but noise and confusion and imitation emotion. That wasn't enough for a woman--just that, and that old childish, shadowy memory of a careless caress and a grave. One had to have love--something warm and personal in your life. Just see what a state of restlessness and despair I'd been in all these months! (p. 304)

Wetmore does not suggest that a career is a bad thing for a woman, only that it is not enough. Marian realizes that she has been living in a self-limiting fantasy world, and her acceptance of Lorraine is an acceptance of her past and of her sentimental self.

Wetmore also explores the connection women made between the condition of the South and their own experience. Marian marries Lorraine because he symbolizes the experience of defeat and submission:

Dear Lorraine! I understood now what it was that had made me feel such a villain, what had waked in me such an agony of remorse and pity, when I leaned out of the window and watched him going patiently away. He was just the very type and figure of my own land--beaten down by defeat and hard circumstances, all the old fire and unruliness crushed out of him, disfigured, old-fashioned, thin, but resolute to atone for the errors of others, patient to bear his fate, and faithful to the land of his birth. (p. 304)

Marian, though she is a victor, still identifies strongly with the victim, with the defeated, with the South. Her love for Lorraine is strangely abstract; he is the South for her, and his significance depends on that equation. And in it, traditional male and female roles

are inverted. Marian is strong and successful, while Lorraine is weak and dependent. The novel ends, not with the fact of their marriage, but with this analytical parallel. Marian's developing consciousness, not her physical circumstances, is the focus of Wetmore's attention. There is no indication of whether the marriage will be successful or happy.

At best, Marian finds only an uneasy resolution between love and rebellion. Wetmore conveniently ends her story with her decision to marry; she refuses to speculate as to whether the marriage and resultant loss of career will really fulfil Marian. Perhaps it will; Marian has by the end of the novel lost most of her romantic illusions about how the world works and seems prepared to make the best of reality. One of Wetmore's strengths is that she deromanticizes both careerism and marriage and presents neither as the solution to all human problems. Her resentment at being forced to choose is clear; she uses language and irony skillfully in A Candle of Understanding to explain the conflict created in ambitious women by the expectation that they be passive and self-sacrificing.

Wetmore gathered together the concerns, conflicts, images, and situations of her Louisiana contemporaries and tried to make sense of them. In doing so she had to explore patriotism, sentimentality, and romanticism without succumbing to their temptations. She had to take a clear look at Southern women's relationship to blacks and to examine their ambivalent attitudes toward the Civil War. There were no easy answers for the intelligent Southern woman; her society was far too complicated to allow complacency. The works of Louisiana women novelists typically reflect confusion, ambivalence, and a marked but covert tendency toward liberal attitudes. These attitudes were

incompatible with the conventions and language of sentimental Victorianism; women progressively discovered, as did their male counterparts, that the only effective aesthetic approach to the Southern experience was to accept and glorify its inherent irony. Deliberate and controlled irony is the element missing from most early novels by Louisiana women, even when they seem to be groping toward it. It is the element which animates Wetmore's work and allows her to present Southern female experience honestly. It is also, of course, the single most characteristic quality of the best modern Southern literature.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources: Works by Louisiana Women

- Bryan, Mrs. Mary Edwards. Wild Work: The Story of the Red River Tragedy. New York: Appleton, 1881.
- [Buckner, Alice Mississippi Morris.] Towards the Gulf: A Romance of Louisiana. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1887.
- Chopin, Kate. Bayou Folk. Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1894.
- Clack, Mrs. Louise M. Our Refugee Household. New York: Blelock, 1866.
- Coltharp, Jeannette Downs. Burrill Coleman, Colored: A Tale of the Cotton Fields. Franklin, Ohio: Editor Publishing, 1896.
- Converse, Florence. Diana Victrix. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin; Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1897.
- Davis, Mollie Evelyn Moore. In War Times at La Rose Blanche. Illus. E. W. Kemble. Boston: D. Lothrop, [c. 1888].
- Jaconetta, Her Loves. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin; Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1901.
- The Price of Silence. Illus. Griswold Tyng. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1907.
- The Wirecutters: A Novel. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1899.
- [Dorsey, Sarah Anne]. Lucia Dare: A Novel by Filia [pseud.]. New York: M. Doolady, 1867.
- Panola: A Tale of Louisiana. Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson and Brothers, [c. 1877].
- Dupuy, Miss Eliza Ann. A New Way to Win a Fortune. Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson and Brothers, 1875.
- Elliott, Maud [Howe]. Atalanta in the South: A Romance. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1886.



- [Handy, Mrs. J. S.] Clip Her Wing; Or, Let Her Soar: A Novel by a Lady of Louisiana [pseud.] New York: G. W. Dillingham, 1889.
- Homes, Mary Sophie [Shaw]. Carrie Harrington; Or, Scenes in New Orleans: A Novel by Millie Mayfield [pseud.] New York: A. Atchison, 1857.
- Jamison, Cecilia Viets. Lady Jane. New York: Century, [c. 1891].
- Jones, Alice Ilgenfritz. Beatrice of Bayou Têche. Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1895.
- Keller, Martha Caroline. The Fair Enchantress; Or, How She Won Men's Hearts. Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson and Brothers, [1883].
- . Love and Rebellion: A Story of the Civil War and Reconstruction. (The Sunnyside Series, 26.) New York: J. S. Ogilvie, [c. 1891].
- . Severed at Gettysburg. New York: J. S. Ogilvie, 1887.
- Keplinger, Mrs. E. M. Berenice: A Novel by Queen of Hearts [pseud.]. New Orleans: Miss S. M. Haight, 1878.
- King, Grace. Grace King of New Orleans: A Selection of Her Writings. Ed. Robert Bush. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1973.
- Louisiana [pseud.]. "Blue and Gray"; Or, Two Oaths and Three Warnings. New Orleans: [L. Graham and Son], 1885.
- McClelland, Mary Greenway. Mammy Mystic. New York: Merriam, [1895].
- [Massena, Agnese M.] Marie's Mistake: A Woman's History by Creole [pseud.]. Boston: Pratt Brothers, [c. 1868].
- Nicholls, Josephine Hamilton. Bayou Triste: A Story of Louisiana. New York: A. S. Barnes, 1902.
- Postell, Catherine. On Toplecôte Bayou. New York: Editor, 1905.
- Pugh, Mrs. Eliza Lofton [Phillips]. In a Crucible: A Novel. Philadelphia: Claxton, Remson, and Haffelfinger; New Orleans: J. A. Gresham, 1872.
- . Not A Hero: A Novel. New Orleans: Blelock, 1867.
- Seibert, Mary Frances. "Zulma": A Story of the Old South. Natchez, Miss.: Natchez Printing and Stationery, 1897.
- [Stempel, Mary Gaillard (Tobin) McCan]. The Finished Web: A Novel by M. G. T. [pseud.]. New Orleans: Current Topics Publishing, 1892.
- Surghnor, Mrs. M. F. Uncle Tom of the Old South: A Story of the South in Reconstruction Days. New Orleans: L. Graham and Son, 1896-97.

[Tiernan, (Mrs.) Frances Christine (Fisher)]. Valerie Aylmer: A Novel by Christian Reid [pseud.]. New York: Appleton, 1871.

Walworth, Jeannette R. Haderman (Mrs. J. H.). Dead Men's Shoes. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1872.

----- . The New Man at Rossmere. New York: Cassell, [c. 1886].

----- . True to Herself. New York: Street and Smith, 1890.

----- . Uncle Scipio: A Story of Uncertain Days in the South. New York: R. F. Fenno, 1896.

----- . Without Blemish: Today's Problem. New York: Cassell, 1886.

Wetmore, Elizabeth Bisland. At the Sign of the Hobby-Horse. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin; Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1910.

----- . A Candle of Understanding: A Novel. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1903.

[Wetmore], Elizabeth Bisland. A Flying Trip Around the World. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1891.

Primary Sources:  
Other Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Materials

- Andrews, Matthew Page. The Women of the South in War Times. Baltimore: Norman, Remington, 1920.
- Boucicalut, Dion. The Octoroon; or, Life in Louisiana. A Play, in four Acts. New York: Samuel French, [1859].
- Braddon, Mrs. M. E. The Octoroon. Chicago: Homewood, n. d.
- Chestnut, Mary Boykin. Mary Chesnut's Civil War. Ed. C. Vann Woodward. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1981.
- Clemens, Samuel Langhorne. Pudd'nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins. Ed. Sidney E. Berger. (Norton Critical Edition.) New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1980.
- Howells, William Dean. Heroines of Fiction. 2 vols. New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1901.
- In Memoriam: Mary Evelyn Moore Davis. New Orleans: Picayune Job Print, 1909.
- Kinnear, John Boyd. "The Social Position of Women in the Present Age," in Woman's Work and Woman's Culture: A Series of Essays. Ed. Josephine E. Butler. London: Macmillan, 1869, pp. 332-66.
- Louisiana Authors: Proceedings of a Round Table Held at the Louisiana State Chatauqua on July 19, 1893. Monroe, La.: Evening News Print, 1893.
- M'Caleb, Thomas, ed. The Louisiana Book: Selections from the Literature of the State. New Orleans: Straughan, 1894.
- Newman, Frances. The Hard-boiled Virgin. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926.
- Putnam, Emily James. "The Lady of the Slave States," in The Lady: Studies of Certain Significant Phases of Her History. New York: G. P. Putman's Sons, 1910; rpt. Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970. Pp. 282-323.
- Reid, Mayne. The Quadroon; Or, Adventures in the Far West. 1857, rpt. Ridgewood, N. J.: Gregg, 1967.
- Southworth, Mrs. E. D. E. N. Retribution: A Tale of Passion. Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson and Brothers, [c. 1889].

Subdued Southern Nobility: A Southern Ideal, by One of the Nobility.  
New York: Sharps, 1882.

[Tardy, Mary T.] Southland Writers: Biographical and Critical Sketches of the Living Female Writers of the South With Extracts from their Writings, by Ida Raymond [pseud.]. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Claxton, Remson, and Haeffelinger, 1870.

Tourgee, Albion W. "The South as a Field for Fiction." Forum, 6 (1888), 405.

Tutwiler, Julia R. "Southern Women in New York." Bookman 18 (Feb. 1904), 624-26.

### Secondary Sources

- Alexander, Albert George. "Louisiana Writers 1875-1900." Thesis Peabody College 1931.
- Auerbach, Nina. Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978.
- Bailey, Hugh C., and William Pratt Dale, II. "Missus Alone in de 'Big House.'" Alabama Review, 8 (Jan. 1955), 43-55.
- Bargainnier, Earl. "The Myth of Moonlight and Magnolias." Louisiana Studies, 15 (Spring 1976), 5-20.
- Basch, Françoise. Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel, 1837-67. Trans. Anthony Rudolf. London: Allen Lane, 1974.
- Baym, Nina. Women's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1978.
- Beer, Thomas. The Mauve Decade: American Life at the End of the Nineteenth Century. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926.
- Bradbrook, Frank W. Jane Austen and Her Predecessors. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1966.
- Brown, Herbert Ross. The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1860. Durham, N. C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1940.
- Buck, Paul H. The Road to Reunion, 1865-1900. Boston: Little, Brown, 1947.
- Bukowski, Anthony. "The Lady and Her Business of Love in Selected Southern Fictions." Studies in the Humanities, 5 (Jan. 1976), 14-18.
- Carroll, Berenice, ed. Liberating Women's History: Theoretical and Critical Essays. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1976.
- Cash, W. J. The Mind of the South. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941.
- Clark, William Bedford. "The Serpent of Lust in the Southern Garden." Southern Review, 10 (Oct. 1974), 805-22.
- Clinton, Catherine. The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South. New York: Pantheon Books, 1982.

- Coulter, E. Merton. The South During Reconstruction, 1865-1877. Vol. VIII of A History of the South, gen. ed. Wendell Holmes Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1947.
- Cowie, Alexander. "The Vogue of the Domestic Novel." South Atlantic Quarterly, 41 (Oct. 1942), 416-25.
- Cr  t  , Liliane. Daily Life in Louisiana, 1815-1830. Trans. Patrick Gregory. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1981.
- Curl, James Stevens. The Victorian Celebration of Death. [Newton Abbott]: David and Charles, [c. 1972].
- Delamont, Sara, and Lorna Duffin, eds. The Nineteenth-Century Woman: Her Cultural and Physical World. London: Croom Helm; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1978.
- Devoto, Bernard. "Fiction Fights the Civil War." Saturday Review of Literature, 17 (Dec. 18 1937), 3-4, 15-16.
- Douglas, Ann. The Feminization of American Culture. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977.
- . "Soft-Porn Culture." New Republic, 183 (30 August 1980), 25-29.
- Edwards, Anne. Road to Tara: The Life of Margaret Mitchell. New Haven and New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1983.
- Ellison, Ralph. Shadow and Act. New York: Random House, 1953.
- Fetterley, Judith. The Resisting Reader. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1977.
- Fiedler, Leslie. Inadvertant Epic: From Uncle Tom's Cabin to Roots. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979.
- . Love and Death in the American Novel. New York: Stein and Day, 1966.
- Fletcher, Marie. "The Southern Heroine in the Fiction of Representative Southern Women Writers." Diss. Louisiana State Univ. 1963.
- Gaines, Francis Pendleton. The Southern Plantation: A Study in the Development and Accuracy of a Tradition. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1924; rpt. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1962.
- Garrison, Dee. "Immoral Fiction in the Late Victorian Library." American Quarterly, 28 (Spring 1976), 71-89.
- Genovese, Eugene D. Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made. New York: Pantheon Books, 1976.

- Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979.
- Gorham, Deborah. The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1982.
- Habegger, Alfred. Gender, Fantasy, and Realism in American Literature. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1982.
- Hart, James D. The Popular Book: A History of America's Literary Taste. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1950.
- Heilbrun, Carolyn G., and Margaret R. Higonnet, eds. The Representation of Women in Fiction: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1981. n. s. 7. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1983.
- Herzog, Kristin. Women, Ethnicity, and Exotics: Images of Power in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Fiction. Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1983.
- Holman, C. Hugh. The Immoderate Past: The Southern Writer and History. Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1977.
- Houghton, Walter E. The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1957.
- Jameson, Frederick. The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981.
- Johnson, Gerald W. South-Watching: Selected Essays. Ed. Fred Hobson. Chapel Hill and London: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1983.
- Johnston, James Hugo. Race Relations in Virginia and Miscegenation in the South, 1776-1860. Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1970.
- Jones, Anne. "'The Bad Little Girl of the Good Old Days': Sex, Gender, and the Southern Social Order," in Recasting: "Gone With the Wind" in American Culture. Ed. Darden Asbury Pyron. Miami: Univ. Presses of Florida, 1983. Pp. 105-16.
- Jones, Anne Goodwyn. Tomorrow is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1981.
- Kelley, Mary. Private Woman, Public Stage: Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America. New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1984.
- , Memories of a Southern Woman of Letters. New York: Macmillan, 1932.

- Lestage, H. O., Jr. "The White League and its Participation in Reconstruction Riots." Louisiana Historical Quarterly, 18 (July 1935), 617-95.
- Litwack, Leon F. Been in the Storm So Long: The Emergence of Black Freedom in the South. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979.
- Lively, Robert A. Fiction Fights the Civil War: An Unfinished Chapter in the Literary History of the American People. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1957.
- MacAndrew, Elizabeth, and Susan Gorsky. "Why Do They Faint and Die? The Birth of the Delicate Heroine." Journal of Popular Culture, 8 (1975), 735-45.
- Martin, Jay. Harvest of Change: American Literature, 1865-1914. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967.
- McVoy, Lizzie Carter, and Ruth Bates Campbell. A Bibliography of Fiction by Louisianans and on Louisiana Subjects. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1935.
- Mims, Edwin. History of Southern Fiction. Vol. VIII of The South in the Building of the Nation. Richmond, Va.: Southern Historical Publication Society, 1909.
- Miyoshi, Masao. The Divided Self: A Perspective on the Literature of the Victorians. New York: New York Univ. Press, 1969.
- Modleski, Tania. Loving With a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1982.
- Mott, Frank Luther. Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States. New York: Macmillan, 1947.
- Mussell, Kay. Women's Gothic and Romantic Fiction: A Reference Guide. (American Popular Culture, ser. ed. M. Thomas Inge.) Westport, Conn. and London: Greenwood Press, 1981.
- Newton, Judith Lowder. Women, Power, and Subversion: Social Strategies in British Fiction, 1778-1860. Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1981.
- Nye, Russell B. The Unembarrassed Muse: The Popular Arts in America. New York: Dial Press, 1970.
- O'Brien, Kenneth. "Race, Romance, and the Southern Literary Tradition," in Recasting: "Gone With the Wind" in American Culture. Ed. Darden Asbury Pyron. Miami: Univ. Presses of Florida, 1983. Pp. 153-66.
- O'Neill, William L. Everyone Was Brave: The Rise and Fall of Feminism in America. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969.



- Papashvily, Helen Waite. All the Happy Endings: A Study of the Domestic Novel in America, the Women Who Wrote It, the Women Who Read It, in the Nineteenth Century. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956.
- Pattee, F. L. The Feminine Fifties. New York: D. Appleton, 1942.
- Pettit, Arthur G. "The Black and White Curse: Pudd'nhead Wilson and Miscegenation," in Mark Twain and the South. Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1974, pp. 139-155, 207-210.
- Poovey, Mary. The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen. (Women in Society and Culture, ser. ed. Catharine R. Stimpson.) Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Rose, Willie Lee. Race and Region in American Historical Fiction: Four Episodes in Popular Culture. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979.
- Slavery and Freedom. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982.
- "Reforming Women," The New York Review of Books, 29 (7 Oct 1982), 15.
- Rubin, Louis D. William Elliott Shoots a Bear: Essays on the Southern Literary Imagination. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1975.
- Ruoff, John Carl. "Southern Womanhood, 1865-1920: An Intellectual and Cultural Study." Diss. Univ. of Illinois 1976.
- Russ, Joanna. How to Suppress Women's Writing. Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1983.
- "Somebody is Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's My Husband: The Modern Gothic." Journal of Popular Culture, 6, no. 4 (Spring 1973), 666-91.
- "What Can a Heroine Do? Or Why Women Can't Write," in Images of Women in Fiction. Ed. Susan Koppleman Cornillon. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green Univ. Popular Press, 1972.
- Schuler, Kathryn Reinhart. "Women in Public Affairs in Louisiana During Reconstruction." Louisiana Historical Quarterly, 19 (July 1936), 668-750.
- Scott, Anne Firor. The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970.
- Showalter, Elaine. A Literature of Their Own. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977.
- Shugg, Roger W. Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana: A Social History of White Farmers and Laborers During Slavery and After, 1840-1875. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1939 and 1968.

- . "Survival of the Plantation System in Louisiana." Journal of Southern History, 3 (August 1937), 311-25.
- Siefert, Susan. The Dilemma of the Talented Heroine: A Study in Nineteenth Century Fiction. (Monographs in Women's Studies, ser. ed. Sherri Clarkson.) Montreal: Eden Press, 1977.
- Simpson, Lewis P. The Dispossessed Garden: Pastoral and History in Southern Literature. Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1975.
- Spacks, Patricia Meyer. The Female Imagination. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975.
- Taylor, Helen. "Gender, Race and Region: A Study of Three Postbellum Women Writers of Louisiana--Grace King, Ruth McEnery Stuart and Kate Chopin." D. Phil. thesis Sussex Univ. 1984.
- Ten Harmsell, Henrietta. Jane Austen: A Study in Fictional Conventions. The Hague: Mouton, 1964.
- Thompson, Donald E., comp. A Bibliography of Louisiana Books and Pamphlets in the T. P. Thompson Collection of the University of Alabama Library. University: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1947.
- Thomson, Patricia R. The Victorian Heroine: A Changing Ideal. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1956.
- Utter, Robert Palfrey, and Gwendolyn Bridges Needham. Pamela's Daughters. London: Lovat Dickson, 1937.
- Vicenus, Martha. A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1977.
- Vivenus, Martha, ed. Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1972.
- Weibel, Kathryn. Mirror, Mirror: Images of Women Reflected in Popular Culture. Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, Anchor, 1977.
- Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood." American Quarterly, 18 (Summer 1966), 151-74.
- . Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century. Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1976.
- Wilmer, Richard H. "Collecting Civil War Novels." Colophon, 3 (N S, Autumn 1938), 513-14.
- Wilson, Edmund. Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War. New York: Oxford U. Press, 1962.
- Wood, Ann Douglas. "The Literature of Impoverishment: The Women Local Colorists in America 1865-1914." Women's Studies, 1 (1972), 3-45.

Wood, E. O. "Public Education in Louisiana During the Reconstruction Period, 1866-1876." Journal of the Louisiana Teachers Association, 9 (March 1932), 30-34.

Wyatt-Brown, Bertram. Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1981.

## Vita

Susan Elizabeth Millar Williams was born in Little Rock, Arkansas on January 19, 1956, to Paul H. Millar, jr., a general surgeon, and Margaret Ann Woods Millar. She grew up in Stuttgart, Arkansas, where she graduated from Stuttgart High School in 1974. In 1977 she received her B.A. in English from Hendrix College and married Dwight Charles Williams, also from Stuttgart. In 1979 she received an M.A. in English from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, where she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. She is presently a candidate for the Ph.D. in English from Louisiana State University at Baton Rouge, where she has served for the past two years as assistant editor on The Eighteenth Century: A Currrent Bibliography.

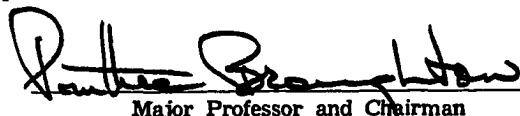
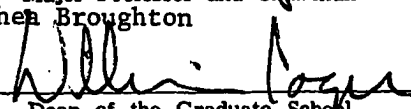
## EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: Susan Millar Williams

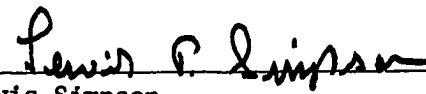
Major Field: English

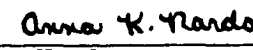
Title of Thesis: Love and Rebellion: Louisiana Women Novelists, 1865-1919

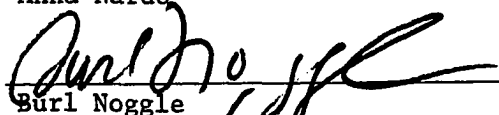
Approved:

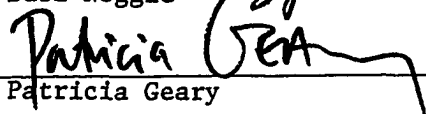
  
Major Professor and Chairman  
Panthea Broughton  
  
Dean of the Graduate School

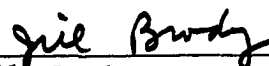
### EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

  
Lewis Simpson

  
Anna Nardo

  
Burl Noggle

  
Patricia Geary

  
Jill Brody

Date of Examination: July 12, 1984